

What is the Composition of the House of Commons?

At the June 2017 General Election the House of Commons comprised of 650 MPs. Each MP represents a constituency. The number of MPs in the House of Commons does change, depending on the different boundaries. The number of MPs in the House of Commons is determined by the [Boundary Commission](#), on the request of Parliament.

The make-up of the House of Commons at the 2017 General Election was:

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats Won</u>	<u>Change since 2015 Election</u>
Conservatives	317	-14
Labour	262	+30
Scottish Nationalist Party	35	-21
Liberal Democrats	12	+4
DUP	10	+2
Sinn Fein	7	+3
Plaid Cymru	4	+1
Green Party	1	0
Speaker	1	0
Independent (Sylvia Hermon)	1	1

What is the descriptive representation of the House of Commons?

One long-standing criticism of the House of Commons is that it does not adequately represent the make-up of Britain as a whole. This criticism remains in place, however, it does appear to be improving:

<u>Group</u>	<u>Number of MPs</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Number in Parliament v 2015</u>
Women	208	32%	+ 2.7% (was 191)
Ethnic Minorities	52	8%	+ 1.7% (was 41)
Disabled MPs	8	1.23%	+ 0.31% (was 6)
MPs from Comprehensive Schools	331	51%	+ 2% (was 319)
LGBT Members	45	6.92%	+ 2% (was 32)

N.B There are no definitive figures for Disabled MPs and this figure is a best estimate.

Does the Descriptive Representation of the House of Commons matter?

Arguments exist on both sides as to whether or not the descriptive representation of the House of Commons matters:

Yes, it matters:

- A more representative Commons will be better able to empathise with the issues facing them and their communities.
- It may give more minorities faith in the work of Parliament.
- It is dangerous for democracy if parliament is dominated by a certain demographic. If certain groups are excluded, they feel cut off from the political process.
- When certain groups are excluded there are fewer discussion around the issues that affect them.
- Too much talent currently goes unrecognised because Parliament is not opened up to all of those who can play a role.
- It is hypocritical for political parties to talk up against discrimination when groups are not fairly represented in Parliament.

No, it's irrelevant:

- Some constituents will always be represented by people who are unlike them. This does not mean that their MPs cannot empathise.
- Good MPs are able to represent their constituents all of the time, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or gender.
- Britain is a representative democracy in which MPs are there to broadly reflect the views of their constituent. To do this, they do not have to mirror their constituents.
- Women and other social groups are not homogenous. Citing that there are too few women in Parliament, for example, is vague and potentially insulting. Women, represent extremely diverse views and it is impossible to group them simply as a minority.
- The personal abilities of a candidate should be what matters in elected politicians. It would be unfair to positively discriminate in favour of minorities, which would inevitably mean that high quality candidates are overlooked because they are in the majority.

What is the role of MPs?

MPs have no set job description. The job is what they choose to make of it.

However, there are four key roles that you may expect an MP to fulfil:

- Representing their constituents.
- Supporting their party.
- Scrutinising or playing a role in government.
- Creating and debating laws.

For their role, MPs are paid £77,379 a year. They also receive allowance to cover the expenses of running an office. They also receive expenses to account for the fact that in their job they have to be in two places at different times. A Guardian survey in 2013 that MPs worked an average of 69 hours a week. This compared to 57.3 hours for a Secondary School Headteacher.

What are different types of MP?

- **Speaker** – Four MPs are Speakers. This group is made up of the Speaker of the House of Commons and Four Deputy Speakers. The Speaker gives up his party status when he becomes Speaker. The same is also expected of the Deputy Speakers.

The Speaker of the House of Commons

The Speaker of the House of Commons is the presiding officer of the House of Commons. They decide who speaks in debates and are in charge of maintaining order in the House of Commons and can punish members who do not follow the rules of Parliament.

The Speaker is also responsible of the administration of the House of Commons. For example, the Speaker can recall the House of Commons during a national emergency. This last happened in September 2014 to discuss potential airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq.

The Speaker also continues to sit as an MP and continues to represent his own constituents. However, they give up their party status when they are chosen to be the Speaker.

The Speaker is chosen by their fellow MPs, but traditionally does not campaign for the role. When the Speaker is chosen they are ceremoniously dragged to the Speaker's chair by other MPs.

The current Speaker of the House of Commons is Jon Bercow. He took over from Michael Martin in 2009 after Martin was criticised for not fully dealing with the MPs expenses scandal.

The Denison Rule

One of the potential jobs of the Speaker is to settle a tied vote in the House of Commons. As a result of his stance of impartiality within the House, if a vote is ever tied in the House of Commons the Speaker will always vote, as far as possible, in line with the status quo. For instance, the Speaker, in a tie, would vote against a vote of no confidence in the Government.

The last time that the Speaker voted in a division was in July 1993 in a vote over the Maastricht Treaty.

- **Government Ministers** – Members of Parliament may also be part of the Government. As such, because of the Fusion of Powers, they continue to sit in the House of Commons. The Government currently has 121 ministers, 87% of whom are from the House of Commons.
- **Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition** – The Opposition is made up of the Shadow Cabinet of the party that won the 2nd most seats in the General Election. Currently Jeremy Corbyn has 27 individuals in his Shadow Cabinet.
- **Backbenchers** – The rest of MPs, the vast majorities, are Backbench MPs. They are called Backbenchers because they hold no role in the Government, Opposition or Administration in the House of Commons. They traditionally, therefore, sit further back in the House of Commons – hence their name.

What do MPs have to worry about?

MPs have a difficult task because they have a number of competing factors to consider. These include:

- **Their Political Party**

MPs almost always rely heavily on their political party to get elected to Parliament.

MPs are thus largely beholden to their party for their position. In return for their help in getting elected, political parties expect loyalty in return. MPs are expected to 'toe the party line' and vote in the way that the Party Leader and his whips insist. If MPs do not do this they may have the 'party whip withdrawn' these means that they no longer sit as MPs for their political party.

Since 1950 only 13 MPs have been elected to the House of Commons as **Independents** or as members from **minority parties**.

- The only independently elected MP as of April 2017 is **Sylvia Hermon**. Although she was elected as a member of the UUP, she quit the party and sat as an independent because of the increasingly close relationship between the UUP and the Conservatives.

Current minor party MPs are:

Caroline Lucas (Green Party) – Caroline Lucas became the Green Party’s first elected representative in the House of Commons in 2010 and has been re-elected twice since.

Between 2010 and 2015 there were additional minor party MPs:

- **Mark Reckless and Douglas Carswell (UKIP)** – In 2014, Mark Reckless and Douglas Carswell resigned the Conservative Whip and joined UKIP. They quit parliament and ran in the ensuing by-election and won their seats as UKIP candidates. They therefore became UKIP’s first elected politicians.
- **George Galloway (Respect)** – George Galloway used to be a member of the Labour Party but had the whip withdrawn for his opposition to Tony Blair’s war in Iraq. In May 2010 he won his Bradford West seat standing for the Respect Party.

MPs with the whip withdrawn

Although Sylvia Hermon is the only current MP elected as an independent, there are a number of people who have had the whip withdrawn by their party and so currently sit as independents:

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) – Was suspended by the Conservative Party after two claims of sexual offences against members of his staff.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) – Was suspended by the Labour Party after claims of sexual misconduct were made against him.

Ivan Lewis (Bury South) - Was suspended by the Labour Party after claims of sexual misconduct were made against him.

Jared O’Mara (Sheffield Hallam) - Was suspended by the Labour Party after claims racist and homophobic Facebook messages were discovered

Other famous examples of MPs having the whip withdrawn include:

September 2015 – Michelle Thompson had the SNP whip withdraw for inappropriate financial arrangements with a charity called ‘women for independence’.

February 2015 – Malcolm Rifkind (Conservative) and Jack Straw (Labour) both had the whip withdrawn after they were filmed by an undercover reporter offering their services to private companies in exchange for money.

July 2013 – The Liberal Democrat MP, David Ward, had the Party Whip withdrawn for comments he made over Israel’s policy over Palestine.

October 2003 – George Galloway was expelled from the Labour Party after his comments against the Iraq War. He had gone as far to suggest that his party leader, Tony Blair, may be guilty of war crimes.

If an MP wants to advance their own career, they will need the support of their political party. However, some Backbench MPs are renowned for rebelling against their party and are far more independent than other MPs.

Famously Rebellious MPs

Kate Hoey (Labour) – Has voted against her party 31.9% of the time since June 2017.

Graham Stringer (Labour) - Has voted against his party 31.3% of the time since June 2017.

Kenneth Clarke (Conservative) – Has voted against his party 23.4% of the time since June 2017.

▪ **Their Constituency**

MPs have to be careful to look after the issues that matter in their constituents. MPs regularly hold [constituency surgeries](#) and attend constituency meetings about issues that affect their constituents. MPs often deal with issues on behalf of their constituents, representing their interests to government departments. However, a golden rule is that MPs, by convention, only deal with their own constituents. MPs also represent everyone in their constituency, regardless of the political allegiance of their constituents.

One of the problems with the Fusion of Powers is that Government Ministers may not have the time to become effective constituency MPs. Theresa May and Boris Johnson, for example, are constituency MPs. As their government roles take all of their time they leave most constituency matters to their constituency agent. This means that not all citizens in the UK are receiving equal attention from an elected Member of Parliament. Despite this, it is very rare for a government ministers to lose their seat at a General Election. In the 1997 General Election five Conservative Government Ministers lost their seat. These included Michael Portillo, the Secretary of State for Defence. Only one sitting PM has ever lost their seat. This was Conservative Leader Arthur Balfour in 1906.

According to a 2015 Survey MPs spend just over 50% of their week working on parliamentary, rather than constituency work.

▪ **The Nation**

Although MPs represent their individual constituents, they also work for the entire nation.

They debate and vote on laws that might not significantly affect their constituents. MPs may also sit on or chair Select Committees.

There can often be a conflict between the national interest and local interest. One of the things that MPs have to try to do is make a judgement in these circumstances.

Examples of conflicts between local and national interest

In recent years Parliament has voted for a major infrastructure project called High Speed Rail 2 (HS2). This plan involves a major High-Speed Rail Line between London and Northern Cities such as Leeds and Manchester. Many MPs represent constituencies which will have to have homes and business destroyed to make room for the new rail line. However, they voted largely for the High-Speed Rail Bill as they believed it be in the national interest.

In June 2016 52% of voters chose to leave the European Union. However, it is estimated that 418 constituencies out of 650 had a majority in favour of remaining. This means when considering the Brexit result and triggering Article 50 many MPs had to vote against the wishes of their constituents. However, despite this, only 114 MPs voted against the Article 50 bill.

▪ **Their Own Conscience and Interests**

MPs might have their own interests and preferences. They might also introduce their own attempts to change the law, called Private Members Bills. Sometimes, however, MPs can also act on behalf of **Special Interest Groups**. MPs are consistently lobbied by people who want their views represented in Parliament.

In 2013 the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act was passed by Parliament by 359 to 154. This legalised gay marriage in the UK and gave it equal status under the law to heterosexual marriage. This bill was opposed by Sir Gerald Howarth, the MP for Aldershot, who made clear that he was opposed to this bill on moral grounds.

Does an MP have to vote the way his constituency wants?

Britain is a **representative democracy**, this means that MPs are elected to represent their constituents. However, Britain also follows a **trustee model** of representation. This is also sometimes called the Burkean Model after Edmund Burke who famously said in 1774 that *“your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion”*. In this trustee model of representation MPs do not have to vote as the majority of their constituents might want.

The Example of Jeremy Wright and High-Speed Rail

Jeremy Wright is the Conservative MP for Southam and Kenilworth. It is estimated that 80% of his constituents are opposed to the High Speed Rail project. However, despite this, he has not spoken against or voted against any aspect of the High Speed Rail project. However, some MPs have shown a willingness to actively seek the views of their constituents before making decisions.

The Example of Nick De Bois and Syria

Nick De Bois is the Conservative MP for Enfield North. When Parliament was debating the British military he emailed all of the constituents he had on his email contact list and asked for their opinions. He then voted against British involvement in Syria, despite the majority of the Conservative Party voting in favour.

How does the Commons scrutinise and hold to account the executive?

There are a number of mechanisms by which the House of Commons, and MPs within it, can scrutinise the executive:

- o Commons Committees
- o Ministers Questions
- o Confidence Votes
- o Early Day Motions and Debates
- o The work of the Opposition

How are Commons Committees made up?

Compared to the USA, committees pale in their power. In the US Congress committees are extremely well funded and have huge numbers of support staff. They also have enhanced powers. For example, U.S committees have the power of subpoena (legally obliging people to give evidence to a committee).

However, despite not having as much power as their US counterparts, committees are extremely important in Parliament and are the place where much of the work of Parliament goes on. There are three main types of committees:

- o **Select Committees**
- o **General Committees** (Previously called standing committees)
- o **Public Bill Committees**

What are Select Committees?

Select Committees were established in 1980 to monitor the work of government departments or a major project that is in existence.

There are three types of Select Committee:

- o Commons Committees – Only made up of MPs
- o Lords Committees – Only made up of the Lords
- o Joint Committees

The most prominent and powerful type of Select Committees are Commons Committees.

Commons Select Committees each have 11 backbench MP members who are elected by their own party. The party balance of membership is made up in proportion to the number of seats in the House of Commons. Previously they were selected by party whips – hence the name ‘Select’. The Committees hold hearings and can call witnesses, both from the Government and from outside experts, to give evidence. The committees gather written evidence, examine witnesses and then report their findings to the Commons. There is a Commons Select Committee for each government department, examining three aspects: spending, policies and administration. Select Committees are not involved in the passage of legislation. Instead, their job is to hold the government department to account. There are also Select Committees that look at an aspect of governance across the departments and internal select committees that deal with Commons procedure.

Commons Select Committees

Departmental Select Committees

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee
Communities and Local Government Select Committee
Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee
Defence Select Committee
Education Select Committee
Exiting the European Union Select Committee
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee
Foreign Affairs Select Committee
Health Select Committee
Home Affairs Select Committee
International Development Select Committee
International Trade Select Committee
Justice Select Committee
Northern Ireland Affairs Committee
Science and Technology Select Committee
Scottish Affairs Committee
Transport Select Committee
Treasury Select Committee
Welsh Affairs Select Committee
Work and Pensions Select Committee

Examples of Topical Select Committees

Environmental Audit Committee
Public Accounts Select Committee
Petitions

Examples of Internal Select Committees

Backbench Business Committee
Committee on Standards

Transport Select Committee

What is the remit of the Committee?

The Committee exists to examine the policies, administration and expenditure of the Department of Transport.

What is its current membership?

The Committee is chaired by Labour MP Lilian Greenwood. The party balance of the Committee is as follows:

Labour – 5 MPs

Conservatives – 4 MPs

Liberal Democrats – 1 MP

Scottish National Party – 1 MP

What current inquiries is it conducting?

Examples of its current inquiries include:

- An inquiry into the effect of Brexit on Freight Services
- An inquiry into the effect of Transport on Air Quality

What reports has it recently published?

In March 2018 the Committee published a report into improving Air Quality. It reported that Air Pollution was a National Health Emergency and criticised successive governments for not doing enough to challenge it.

Public Accounts Select Committee

What is the remit of the Committee?

The Committee exists to oversee all government expenditure and to ensure that taxpayers money is being properly managed.

What is its current membership?

The Committee is currently chaired by Labour MP Meg Hillier. The party balance in the Committee as is follows:

Labour – 6 MPs

Conservatives – 7 MPs

Scottish National Party – 1 MP

Liberal Democrats – 1 MP

What current inquiries is it conducting?

Examples of its current inquiries include:

- An inquiry into the UK's financial settlement with the EU upon Brexit
- An inquiry into the performance of HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs)

What reports has it recently published?

In March 2018 the Committee reported on readiness of the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for Brexit. They concluded that the Department had failed to adequately reprioritise its agenda in the wake of the EU Referendum result.

The constitutional expert Peter Hennessy called the Public Accounts Committee the “Queen of Select Committees” because it so important and prestigious.

Backbench Business Committee

What is the remit of the Committee?

The Committee was created after the 2010 General Election after being proposed as part of the Wright Report. The Committee exists determine what backbench business should be put before the House in the one day a week that is put aside for backbench business.

How does it work?

Backbench MPs can approach the Backbench Business Committee with suggestions for issues that they wish to be debated.

What is its current membership?

The Committee is currently chaired by Labour MP Ian Mearns. The party balance in the Committee as is follows:

Labour – 3 MPs

Conservatives – 4 MPs

Scottish National Party – 1 MP

What debates have been held as a result of the Backbench Business Committee?

In April 2018 a debate took place on the use of Surgical Mesh

In April 2018 a debate was held on cancer treatment

What does a Select Committee do?

Select Committees scrutinise a number of elements of government departments:

- Policy Proposals (White Papers and Green Papers)
- Departmental Decisions
- Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of Bills
- Departmental Expenditure
- The Workings of Executive Agencies
- Appointments made by the Department

Select Committees have grown in power in the 21st Century. This is largely due to the [Wright Report](#) being put into action.

Wright Report (2009)

The Wright Report made a number of recommendations. When they came to power in 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government agreed to implement these recommendations in full:

- Reduction in the number of committees and in the size of a standard departmental committee, possibly to eleven members
- Chairs of departmental and similar select committees should be directly elected by secret ballot of the House using the alternative vote.
- Members of departmental and similar committees should be elected from within party groups by secret ballot.
- Backbench business should be scheduled by the House rather than by Ministers
- The House should decide its sitting pattern for itself.
- An effective e-petitions system should be introduced, including the possibility that members of the public might be able to compel an issue to be debated in the House.
- One backbench motion per month should be routinely scheduled for debate.

How effective are Select Committees?

Strengths of Select Committees may include:

- The Select Committee system allows for the questioning of ministers and forces them to explain themselves. If a witness is unwilling to give evidence, the committee can serve them with an order to attend or produce papers or records.
- Select Committees involve cross party cooperation working towards a common goal.
- They can do a lot more than representatives do on the floor of the house as Commons debates are not long enough to examine any issue in depth.
- Select Committees examine the evidence from different sources in detail and act on that evidence.
- It allows Parliamentarians to develop specialisms that they can use across Parliament.
- They keep government ministers honest, knowing they may have to account for their actions later in a Select Committee hearing.
- They may persuade a government to change course.

Weaknesses of Select Committees may include:

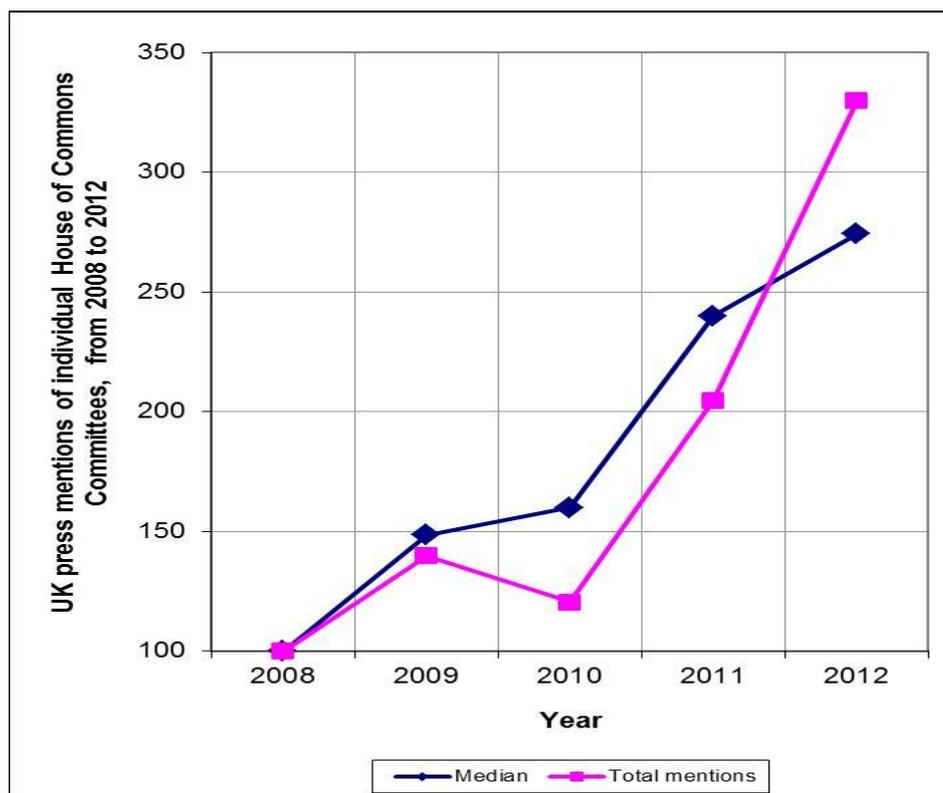
- The membership of select committees reflects the composition of the house so the government has a majority in select committees. A backbench MP from the governing party may be reluctant to expose wrong doing or irregularities, especially if they are ambitious.
- Witnesses can withhold important information. For example, information may be withheld on the grounds that it would compromise national security and undermine the work of the intelligence services. This happened when the Foreign Affairs Committee scrutinised the Iraq war.
- The Government is not bound by any recommendations made by select committees and can reject them.
- Committees are often not very well resourced. Whereas government ministers have any army of advisors and researchers, Committee budgets do not match this.
- Witnesses cannot be forced to attend.

In 2018 the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee requested three times that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg appear in front of them in order to answer questions about the Cambridge Analytica scandal. However, he has consistently said he will not appear before the committee.

How are Select Committees becoming more effective?

It has been generally recognised that in recent years Select Committees have become more effective:

- The election of Committee Chairs now makes them sort after by Backbenchers and makes Select Committees a potential career alternative to aiming to become a Minister.
- They have been given increased visibility through appearances and questioning of important public figures, such as Rupert Murdoch during the Phone Hacking Scandal.
- They now play an active role in the recruitment of Government Ministers by holding [pre-appointment hearings](#). This allows them to scrutinise what a new minister will do, rather than simply reacting to what they have done.



- The legitimacy of Select Committees has grown because the Party Whips can no longer decide who sits on them. This is further enhanced by the fact that votes for the seats of the Select Committees are done by secret ballot.

What are Public Bill Committees (Formally ‘Standing Committees’)?

Public Bill Committees are ad-hoc rather than permanent and are set up to consider specific pieces of legislation. Standing Committees consist of 15-25 MPs and the members reflect the overall numbers parties have in the House of Commons. Most bills go through to a Public Bill Committee after the Second Reading in the House of Commons.

Public Bill Committees go through a bill clause by clause, therefore ensuring the whole of the bill is considered. Although Amendments can be made to bills, the Party Whips are able to use their influence to ensure that only Government amendments are the ones that are seriously considered.

How effective are Public Bill Committees?

Despite the resurgence of Select Committees, Public Bill Committees have not had the same resurgence. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Because Public Bill Committees are temporary, members can’t build up expertise like they can with Select Committees.
- Select Committees are supported by a permanent support staff who become specialised in support that committee. This is not the case for Public Bill Committees.
- The influence of the Party Whips remains strong in the Public Bill Committees. This means that the process remains adversarial within them.
- Places on Public Bill Committees are not seen as grandiose as those on Select Committees. This means MPs often join them reluctantly and they are not given their full attention.

Some of these problems were highlighted with the case of the Conservative MP Sarah Wollaston in 2011 who was not giving a seat on the Public Bill Committee scrutinising the Coalition Health and Social Care Bill. This is despite the fact that she is still a practicing GP.

She had voiced doubts about the Coalition’s plans, so the Whips did not want her on the Committee. However, she was elected by her fellow MPs to sit on the Health Select Committee, as the Whips could not control this.

What are Minister’s Questions and Prime Minister’s Questions?

Minister’s Questions are an important mechanism for Parliament holding the Government to account. These take place each day, with Ministers having to come to the House of Commons to take questions. These provide the chance for backbenchers to scrutinise the work of the Government.

The most prominent example of Parliamentary Questions is **Prime Ministers Questions**. This takes place every Wednesday at 12.00 for 30 minutes. Originally PMQs was held in two 15 minute sessions, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, this was changed by Tony Blair in 1997.

Although Prime Minister's Questions is meant to afford Backbench MPs the chance to hold the PM to account, many people see it increasingly as theatre or 'Punch and Judy politics'. This is particularly the case when the Leader of the is questioning, as he is allocated six questions to ask the Prime Minister. Often questions are planted by the government, with friendly backbenchers able to ask the Prime Minister an easy question to enable him to show off the Government's record. For example, throughout 2014/2015 Conservative MPs were asked to use the phrase 'long-term economic plan' when asking the Prime Minister Questions.

Alongside asking in question time, MPs can write to a Minister and expect a response. Asking questions in this way is known as **tabling questions**. Ministers then have three days with which to respond, even if this is orally within the House of Commons. Questions can also be tabled for Parliamentary Question Time. There are some limits on the questions an MP can ask.

Limits on what an MP can ask during Question Time

- They cannot ask questions that go back more than 30 years
- They cannot ask questions about ongoing legal proceedings
- They cannot ask a question that has already been asked in the last 6 months
- They cannot ask a question that they could readily find out from the written record
- They cannot ask a question that is not reserved for the House of Commons (some issues are devolved issues to be dealt with by the Governments and Assemblies of the devolved areas. Others, which are saved for Westminster, are called Reserved Powers).

MPs can also table an **Urgent Question**. This is a question which they believe requires an immediate response. In this case, it is up to the Speaker whether the matter is indeed urgent. If they believe that it is, the Minister can be called to the House to answer questions on the matter.

Urgent Questions

Since 2010 Urgent Questions have become far more common in the House of Commons. This has been largely because the Speaker, Jon Bercow, has shown himself to be a keen supporter of Backbenchers rights to hold the Government to account.

For example, in the last year of the previous Speaker, Michel Martin, there were two Urgent Questions. However, there were sixty in the first year of Jon Bercow's speakership:

Average number of parliamentary days per Urgent Question:

John Bercow (2009-Present) - 2.65

Michael Martin (2000-2009) - 18.73

Betty Boothroyd (1993 – 2000) – 13.61

In January 2017, Michael Fallon, the Secretary of State of Defence, was called to the House to answer a question about the reported misfiring of a Trident Missile.

In April 2018 Amber Rudd, the Home Secretary, was called to answer questions about the Windrush Scandal.

What is a vote of ‘No Confidence’?

A vote of No Confidence is a formal vote in the House of Commons on the motion ‘this House has no confidence in the Government’. By convention, if a Prime Minister loses a vote of no confidence they should resign and request a new general election. The last time this happened in the House of Commons was in 1979 when Labour PM James Callaghan lost a vote of no confidence by just one vote (211-210). A new election was held, which brought Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Government to power.

A vote against the Government in the Queen’s Speech is also, by convention, considered a vote of no confidence. The SNP threatened to do this to any Conservative Government formed after the 2015 General Election without a majority.

What are Early Day Motions and Debates?

Early Day Motions are motions that call for the Commons to debate an issue. MPs can attach their names to Early Day Motions, to increase pressure of the government to debate the issue.

In April 2018 Early Day Motion 708 called for National Sikh War Memorial and was signed by 266 MPs.

Many other debates take place in Parliament on issues of public interest. The Opposition has a number of days set aside in the calendar to hold debates on issues that they want to discuss. These are called **Opposition Days**.

How has there been a growth in e-democracy?

Since 2010 there has been an increasing experiment with **e-democracy**. This has seen online petitions that receive more than 100,000 signatures on the UK Parliament website, be considered for debate in the Commons.

Parliamentary debates based on e-petitions

Second EU Referendum – 4.1 Million Signatures: This e-petition called for a 2nd Referendum on Britain’s membership of the EU.

Prevent Donald Trump visiting the UK – 1.8 Million Signatures: This e-petition called for a ban on Donald Trump visiting the UK.

What is the Commons Liaison Committee?

One particularly important committee is the **Commons Liaison Committee**. This Committee comprises the chairs of all the various commons Select Committees. By convention, the Prime Minister now appears before the Commons Liaison Committee annually. This provides a chance for MPs to question the Prime Minister away from the theatrics of Prime Ministers Question