

# Glossary of UK Parliamentary Terms

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Note: This publication has not been updated since it was last published. Some of the hyperlinks may have changed and may need updating. In addition, some of the information in this publication may be out of date.

## Introduction

In this publication, we provide an explanation of terms used in connection with the UK Parliament: its structure, people, procedures and publications. The glossary is intended to help you to understand the “jargon”, much of which has a traditional origin, used in connection with Parliament.

## Parliamentary Terms Glossary

- Absentee ballot  
A vote cast by someone who cannot reach a polling station. Can be postal or by proxy.
- Act  
A Bill becomes an Act once it receives Royal Assent.
- Additional Member System (AMS)  
The Additional Member System of voting is used for elections to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. Under this system voters have two votes, one for a constituency candidate and the second for a political party. Constituency members are elected under the First Past the Post system. The remaining seats are grouped either regionally or nationally, and electors vote for parties on a list. Each time a party gains enough votes to be allocated a seat, the candidate at the top of the relevant list is elected. The votes are counted first for the constituency seats, and then the additional list seats are allocated in a way that aims to match the proportion of the total number of seats won by each party to their share of the vote.
- Adjournment Debate  
Usually a half-hour debate introduced by a backbencher at the end of business for the day. The subjects raised are often local or personal issues. There is also a series of short adjournment debates on Wednesday mornings.
- Affirmative Procedure  
Some Statutory Instruments must receive Parliament's approval before they can come into force. This is less common than the negative procedure but provides more stringent control. To do this, a Motion approving the SI has to be passed by both Houses within a period of 28 days (or occasionally 40 days, which is specified in the parent Act).
- Affirmation  
Affirmation involves declaring acceptance of the Queen as the right and true monarch. Members may make an affirmation as an alternative to swearing the Oath of Allegiance.
- Agent  
A person who represents candidates in their dealings with the electoral authorities and runs their campaigns.
- All Party Groups  
Groups of MPs and members of the House of Lords who share a particular interest in a subject or country.
- Allocation of time motion (guillotine)  
A means by which time for one or more stages of a Bill is restricted, and the question is put on outstanding business, even though Members may still wish to speak on that business (see Programme order).
- Amendments  
When Members of the House of Commons or the House of Lords are debating or examining Bills, they often want to change some of the details. They can therefore propose changes or amendments, and debate and vote on them in the House. Amendments are usually made during the Committee Stage and in the Report Stage, but in the House of Lords can also be made at Third Reading.
- Another Place  
It is traditional that, when speaking in the House of Commons and House of Lords, members do not refer to the other House by name. Instead they describe it as 'Another Place'.
- Attorney General  
The Attorney General is the Government's principal legal adviser. Usually a Member of Parliament, he provides advice on a range of legal matters, including prepared legislation. As well as carrying out various civil law functions, the Attorney General has final responsibility for the Criminal Law. His deputy is the Solicitor General.
- Back Bench MP  
The back benches are seats in the House of Commons on either side of the chamber that are not occupied by the Government or Opposition spokesmen (who usually sit on the front rows of the House nearest the Speaker).
- Ballot  
Another term for vote. At an election, voters put a cross next to the candidate they have chosen on a ballot paper. They then fold the paper and put it into a ballot box. The ballot box is not opened until all the votes are counted.

- **Ballot box**  
Sealed box with a slit in the lid, into which voters place their ballot papers.
- **Ballot (for Private Members' Bills)**  
These are drawn on the second Thursday that the House sits in each session. The 20 successful members put their Bills down for discussion on particular days (Fridays).
- **Ballot paper**  
Paper containing a list of all candidates standing in a constituency. Voters mark their choice with a cross.
- **Bar of the House**  
The Bar of the House is the name given to a white line across the width of the Chamber of the House of Commons and to a rail in the House of Lords, marking their boundaries. MPs are called to the bar of the House of Lords at the State Opening of Parliament and to hear the Royal Assent to Acts of Parliament. They are not allowed beyond this point when the House is sitting.
- **Battlebus**  
A vehicle used by a party to transport its leader or other senior figures around the country to rallies or to meet the people.
- **Below the Gangway**  
The gangway is a set of stairs which divides the benches on each side of the House of Commons Chamber. The benches 'below the gangway' are generally where the minority parties sit. By tradition, the seats next to the gangway are reserved for former Prime Ministers.
- **Best Value**  
A Government scheme to encourage local authorities to consult much more effectively and efficiently about the services they provide or purchase.
- **Bi-Cameral System**  
A bi-cameral system is a parliamentary system of two legislative chambers. The British system is bi-cameral because both the House of Lords and the House of Commons are involved in the process of making new laws. Bi-cameral means literally 'two chamber'.
- **Bill**  
A proposal for a new law which is debated by Parliament. A Bill becomes an Act when it has passed through both Houses of Parliament and received Royal Assent.
- **Black Rod**  
The Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod is more usually known simply as Black Rod. He is known to the public for the important role he plays in the ceremony of the State Opening of Parliament, when he is sent to the House of Commons to summon MPs to the House of Lords to hear the Queen's Speech. It is traditional that as he reaches the chamber of the House of Commons, the door is slammed in his face. He then knocks three times on the door with the black rod that he carries before being admitted. Black Rod is responsible for accommodation, security and services in the House of Lords. He has a chair in the House of Lords and wears a distinctive black costume. His role is almost equivalent to that of the Serjeant at Arms in the House of Commons.
- **Boundary Commission**  
The body which reviews constituencies every 8-12 years to make sure they represent current population patterns. Widespread changes in Scotland in the wake of the creation of a Scottish Parliament mean they have had a reduction in seats.
- **Budget**  
The Government's tax-raising and spending plans, outlined once a year, typically in the Spring, by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. A pre-Budget often takes place in November.
- **Business Question**  
The Urgent Question asked each Thursday after Oral Questions during which the Leader of the House announces the main items of business to be taken on each sitting day for the next week or so.
- **By-election**  
An election held between General Elections, usually because the sitting MP has died or resigned. While a vacancy exists, a member of the same party in a neighbouring constituency handles constituency matters. When the new Member is elected in the by-election, all outstanding matters are handed back.
- **Cabinet**  
The group of senior Ministers at the head of the Government that decides Government policy. The Prime Minister appoints Ministers to the Cabinet and chairs its meetings. The Cabinet co-ordinates the work of the different government departments. It meets each week and also sets up smaller committees to look at certain issues. Cabinet meetings are private and its members should not disclose any information about them. There is also a Cabinet Office which is the central department of the Government. This department is responsible for ensuring that the Government can work efficiently, and also manages the Civil Service.
- **Candidate**  
Someone putting themselves up for election. Once Parliament has been dissolved, there are no MPs, only candidates.

- **Canvassing**  
During a campaign, active supporters of a party ask voters who they will vote for and try to drum up support for their own candidates.
- **Capacity building**  
Shorthand for a wide range of support, techniques and initiatives, which aim to build the capacity of individuals or organisations within communities to contribute effectively to regeneration and other projects.
- **Catching the Speaker's Eye**  
MPs may speak only if called to do so by the Speaker. MPs therefore try to attract the attention of the Speaker by standing, or half standing, to show that they want to speak - hence the term 'catching the Speaker's eye'. MPs may write or speak to the Speaker in advance to indicate that they want to be called during a particular debate. Ultimately however it is the Speaker who decides who is to speak and an MP might not be called during a debate.
- **Central Lobby**  
The main public area of the Palace of Westminster, where members of the public are received by Members.
- **Chairman of Ways and Means**  
The first Deputy Speaker, with particular responsibility for Private Business and Committees of the Whole House.
- **Chairmen's Panel Members**  
These are appointed by the Speaker from whom are chosen the Chairmen of Standing Committees.
- **Chancellor of the Exchequer**  
The Chancellor of the Exchequer is the principal Finance Minister of the Government. The Chancellor is the head of the Treasury and one of the most important members of the Cabinet. He is responsible for coordinating Government spending. His duties include preparing and presenting the Budget.
- **Chief Whip**  
The Chief Whip is the most important Whip in each party. Whips are MPs or Peers who have been selected by the leadership of their party to act as a channel of communication between the leadership and members in each House. It is the responsibility of the Government Chief Whips to ensure that Government Bills pass through Parliament successfully. The Government Chief Whip sits on a special Cabinet Committee which looks at all proposed Government legislation. In a sense, Chief Whips are business managers who try to ensure that members of their party vote in line with the policies of the party.
- **Civil Service**  
The Civil Service are the permanent administrative staff who work in Government Departments and carry out the policies of Government. In 1999 there were over 490,000 Civil Servants, 80% of whom work in Government Offices outside London. Members of the Civil Service are non-political in the sense that they work for the Government, whichever party forms it. The branch of the Civil Service that works in the Foreign Office and serves in British Embassies abroad is known as the Diplomatic Service.
- **Clause**  
A Bill is divided up into sections that Parliament can debate separately. They are known as clauses. Clauses can be amended or added to a Bill. When a Bill becomes an Act of Parliament these clauses are called sections.
- **Closure Motion**  
Estimates days are the three days in every session that are set aside for consideration of the Estimates. Estimates is the formal term for the government's request for House of Commons approval for the sums needed to cover recurring public expenditure. In practice, however, Estimates days are used for debating one or more select committee reports chosen by the Liaison Committee.
- **Coalition**  
When two or more parties govern together, when neither has an overall majority. Coalitions are very rare in Westminster; the last was the administration led by Winston Churchill during the Second World War. The Liberals propped up the last years of the Labour Government of 1974-9 but did not actually take a part in its running.
- **Command paper**  
Usually a White Paper presented to Parliament by the Government by 'Command of Her Majesty'.
- **Commencement Order**  
A Commencement Order, or Appointed Day Order, is an order designed to bring into force the whole or part of an Act of Parliament at a date later than the date of the Royal Assent. It is a form of Statutory Instrument. There is no time limit on a Commencement Order.
- **Commission for Equalities and Human Rights**  
A body with a wide range of responsibilities relating to rights including race, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, religion and belief.
- **Committal**  
To send a Bill to a committee after it has received a Second Reading.

- **Committee of Selection**  
The committee which appoints Members to standing committees and proposes Members to the Select Committees and domestic committees.
- **Committee of the Whole House**  
When the entire House sits as a committee in the Chamber. It is presided over by the chairman of ways and means or one of his deputies (sitting at the clerk's table), and the mace is placed under the table instead of upon it. The committee stages of Bills of constitutional importance, urgent Bills, and parts of the Finance Bill are usually taken in committee of the whole House instead of in standing committee.
- **Committee stage**  
When a Bill is looked at line-by-line, clause-by-clause and amendments can be made. In the Commons this is undertaken by a Standing Committee. In the Lords all Peers may attend.
- **Consolidated Fund Bill**  
A Bill to authorise issue of sums to maintain Government service. In the Commons, the second and third readings are taken without debate.
- **Consolidation Bill**  
A Bill that seeks to draw together several previous enactments on a subject. In the Commons, the second and third readings are taken without debate.
- **Constituency**  
The geographical unit which elects a single MP. There were 646 constituencies contested in the UK at the 2005 election.
- **Constitution**  
In Great Britain, the Constitution is the whole body of public law, customary as well as statutory, which is continually being modified by custom and by judgment in the courts as well as by the elected representatives of the country.
- **Deferred Divisions**  
For certain types of business, after 10pm (or 7pm on a Thursday), any division is deferred until the following Wednesday at 3.30pm. In such cases, the questions to be decided are listed on a ballot paper in the vote bundle, and members may vote in the "no" lobby at any time from 3.30pm to 5pm (with extra time, if such voting is interrupted by ordinary divisions). The result is then announced in the House.
- **Deferred Questions**  
A Minister may, having notified the Speaker's office, defer until 3.30 (or 12.30 on Thursdays) the answer to any oral question which stands on the Order Paper for that day.
- **Delegated legislation**  
Legislation made by Ministers under powers granted to them in Acts of Parliament, usually by means of a statutory instrument.
- **Deposit**  
£500 paid by candidates or their parties to be allowed to stand. It is returned if the candidate wins 5% or more of the votes cast.
- **Deposited Papers**  
These are papers that are placed in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords Library by a Minister or the Speaker, which have not been presented to the House in any other way (for example an Act, a Command Paper, or a House of Commons paper). Often they are in reply to Parliamentary Questions.
- **Deregulation Order**  
An order to amend or repeal a provision in primary legislation that is considered to impose a burden on business or others.
- **Despatch boxes**  
There are two Despatch Boxes in each House, situated on either side of the Table which separates the Government from the Opposition on the Floor of the House. Ministers and Shadow Ministers stand at the Despatch Boxes when they speak in the Chamber, and often lean on a box and thump it for emphasis during their speeches. The boxes contain bibles.
- **Devolution**  
The delegation of powers to other Parliamentary bodies within the UK, specifically, the Scottish Parliament and Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies.
- **Dissolution**  
Parliament is dissolved by a royal proclamation issued when a general election is to be called or when five years has expired (the maximum life of a Parliament is five years).
- **Division**  
The House of Commons votes by dividing. Those voting Aye (yes) to any proposition walk through the division lobby to the right of the Speaker, and those voting no through the lobby to the left. In the House of Lords, the process is the same except that the Lobbies are called the Contents Lobby and the Not Contents Lobby.
- **Division List**  
A Division List is a list of Members who vote for and against a motion in a Division.
- **Division Lobbies**  
The lobbies which run down either side of each Chamber through which Members of either House must pass to register their votes.

- **Downing Street**  
The official residence of the British Prime Minister is at no.10 Downing Street and that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer is at no. 11 Downing Street.
- **Duration of Parliament**  
A Parliament can last up to five years but after that time there must be a General Election. The Prime Minister can call an election before the five years are over.
- **Early Day Motion**  
A colloquial term for notices of motions given by a member for debate "on an early day" but for which no date has been fixed. Few are actually debated. Generally, EDMs are a way by which members can put on record their opinion on a subject and canvass support for it from fellow-members.
- **Election expenses**  
Candidates are only allowed to spend a limited amount of money on their individual campaign. Accounts must be submitted after the poll proving they did not exceed this limit.
- **Electoral Register**  
A list of all those in a constituency entitled to vote. Also known as electoral roll. The Electoral Register for each constituency is revised each year. Registration is compulsory but, in practice, not everyone registers. Those who do not register cannot vote in elections. Electoral Registers are available, for reference only, in public libraries and local authority offices.
- **Emergency Debate**  
An emergency debate is a debate called at short notice on a subject of a **"specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration"**. An MP may apply to the Speaker for an emergency debate under the rules of Standing Order No. 24. Many more MPs request emergency debates than are granted. The Speaker usually grants no more than one or two a year and limits them to matters of national importance. They take place within 24 hours of being granted.
- **Erskine May**  
The authoritative textbook on the law and practice on both Houses of Parliament.
- **Estimates Days**  
Estimates days are the three days in every session that are set aside for consideration of the Estimates. Estimates is the formal term for the government's request for House of Commons approval for the sums needed to cover recurring public expenditure. In practice, however, Estimates days are used for debating one or more select committee reports chosen by the Liaison Committee.
- **Exit poll**  
A poll asking people how they have voted just after they have left the polling station.
- **European Legislation**  
European legislation is the law of the European Union, of which Britain is a member country. The Union can make laws in two ways, either through the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, or more usually through the European Commission.
- **Filibustering**  
Filibustering is the practice of an MP making a very long speech. This prolongs a debate - the purpose of this is to attempt to prevent a Bill passing through Parliament. MPs who do this hope that the House will run out of time to complete all the stages of the Bill before the session is over.
- **Finance Bill**  
The Finance Bill is the Bill presented to Parliament each year which sets out the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget proposals. Once the Chancellor has read the Budget to the House of Commons, the Bill starts its passage through Parliament in the same way as any other Bill. The House of Lords, however, has no powers over money Bills so the reading of the Bill in this House is just a formality. The Bill receives the Royal Assent in the normal way.
- **First Lord of the Treasury**  
The position of Prime Minister does not constitutionally exist – the Prime **Minister's actual title** is First Lord of the Treasury.
- **First Past the Post**  
Term used to describe the UK's Parliamentary election system. It means a candidate only needs a simple majority - more votes than his or her rivals - to be elected.
- **First Reading**  
When a Bill is printed and formally introduced to Parliament.
- **Five o'Clock Shuffle**  
**The five o'clock shuffle is a ballot to decide which questions will be asked during Question Time. It is so called because it takes place at five o'clock.**
- **Franchise**  
The right to vote -now available to those over 18 and on the electoral register.

- **General Election**  
Election at which all seats in the House of Commons are contested. General elections must take place at least every five years but are usually held after about four years on a date chosen by the Prime Minister. Once dissolution has been announced, the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery issues Writs of Election. At this time the date of meeting for the new Parliament will also be announced. Although the Government continues in office, there cease to be any MPs, and former Members may not use the facilities of the House whilst the General Election is in progress.
- **General Synod measure**  
A measure passed by the General Synod of the Church of England under the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act 1919. These measures, once considered by the Ecclesiastical Committee, and a report having been made by it are considered by both Houses and, if approved, sent for the Royal Assent. These are noted at the end of the Public Bill list.
- **Give Way**  
"Give way" is the term used by MPs who want to interrupt the MP who is speaking to the House of Commons at that time. An MP cannot intervene when another MP is speaking to the House unless that MP allows it by giving way.
- **Government**  
Government is like the management of the country. It is made up of the different Departments run by Ministers, and is headed by the Prime Minister.  
  
The Government is formed by the party that gains the most seats in the House of Commons at a General Election. The leader of that party becomes the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister selects the members of the Government from MPs, Peers, and very occasionally senior people outside Parliament.  
  
The Government does not make laws – Parliament makes laws. The Government can propose new laws in the form of Bills which it presents to Parliament for consideration. In practice, because the Government is formed from the largest party, the laws that it proposes are usually agreed by Parliament. The Government is sometimes also known as the "executive", because it is the part of the British system that is responsible for carrying out or executing the laws of the country.
- **Government Office Network**  
A network of nine offices (one for each Region) who help to improve the way that Central Government works in relation to the regions.
- **Grand Committees**  
There are three Grand Committees, one each for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. They each consist of all MPs who represent constituencies in that country together with up to five members nominated by the Committee of Selection. They meet either at Westminster or in the country they cover, and deal with questions to Ministers, short debates, Ministerial Statements, the consideration of Bills before their Second Reading or Third Reading, and other legislative proposals.
- **Green Paper**  
A Green Paper is a Government publication that details specific issues, and then points out possible courses of action in terms of policy and legislation. It is commissioned if there is an area where new legislation is required, or existing legislation needs to be re-vamped. It contains no commitment to action, it is more a tool of stimulating discussion, but it is often the first step towards changing the law.
- **Guillotine Allocation of Time Motion**  
This limits the time available to debate any stage of a Bill.
- **Hansard**  
The official report of the proceedings of Parliament. It is published daily when Parliament is sitting and records everything that is said and done in both the House of Commons and House of Lords. It is also published weekly, and in bound volumes.
- **Hereditary Peers**  
Hereditary peers inherit their title. The House of Lords Act 1999 removed the entitlement of most of the hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords.
- **House of Commons**  
Made up of elected representatives from all UK constituencies, the House of Commons scrutinises and approves legislation, debates the issues of the day, and scrutinises the work of the Government. It is able to question Ministers and Civil Servants about the work that they do. Unlike the House of Lords, the House of Commons looks at the financial work of the Government and must approve Government spending and taxation. The House of Commons is also referred to as the Lower House.

- **House of Commons Papers**  
These include papers that arise out of the deliberations of the House and its committees or which are needed for its work. The main categories of papers included are:
  - Select Committee papers (their research and evidence etc.)
  - Minutes of proceedings of Standing Committees
  - Returns to Addresses by the House
  - Estimates and Appropriation, etc.
  - Accounts
  - Certain Annual and other Reports and Accounts required by Statute to be laid before the House
  - House Returns.
- **House of Lords**  
The Upper House of Parliament, made up of life peers, senior members of the clergy, law lords and a number of elected hereditary peers. The House of Lords will also scrutinise and revise legislation and question the Government but they are not involved in matters of taxation and finance. It spends about two-thirds of its time revising Bills sent from the House of Commons. Indeed, it is often referred to as a 'revising chamber'. The House of Lords also acts as a check on the Government and is a forum for debates on topics of the day. It is also the ultimate Court of Appeal.
- **Hung Parliament**  
If after an election no party has an overall majority, then Parliament is said to be "hung". The main parties will then try to form a coalition with one or more of the minor parties.
- **Hybrid Bill**  
A public Bill which, though general in its application, affects the private interests of particular individuals or organisations differently from those of the population at large.
- **I Spy Strangers**  
"I Spy Strangers" was the traditional request for members of the public to leave the galleries of the House of Commons so that the Chamber could sit in private.
- **Joint Committees**  
Committees which include members of both Houses.
- **Landslide**  
The name given to an election which one party wins by a very large margin. Famous landslides in UK elections include Labour's victory in 1945, the Conservative win in 1983 and the election which brought Tony Blair to power in 1997.
- **Law Lords**  
Law Lords (Lords of Appeal in Ordinary) are senior judges, or other holders of high judicial office, who are given life peerages in order to carry out the judicial work of the House of Lords as the highest Court in the Land.
- **Leader of the House of Commons**  
The Leader of the House of Commons is the member of the Government who is responsible for organising Government business in the Commons. The Leader of the House is a member of the Cabinet and works closely with the Chief Whip. The Leader's formal title is President of the (Privy) Council.
- **Leader of the House of Lords**  
The Leader of the House of Lords is responsible for looking after the organisation of Government business and procedure in the House of Lords.
- **Leader of the Opposition**  
The Leader of the Opposition is the title given to the leader of the second largest party (the Opposition) in the House of Commons. He or she is entitled to a salary and sits close to the despatch box on the Opposition Front Bench. The Leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords heads the main party opposing the Government.
- **Liaison Committee**  
The Select Committee consisting of **Chairmen of all House of Commons'** Select Committees. Prime Minister appears before this Committee.
- **Life Peers**  
A Life Peer differs from a Hereditary Peer in that the receiver cannot pass the title on to his or her children. Although Life Peers are appointed by the Queen, it is the Prime Minister who nominates them. By convention, the Leader of the Opposition and other party leaders can nominate a certain number as well.
- **Lord Chamberlain**  
The Lord Chamberlain performs a number of ceremonial duties, e.g. the arrangements for the State opening of Parliament. He is also responsible for the Queen's Robing Room and Royal Gallery.
- **Lord Chancellor**  
The Lord Chancellor presides over the House of Lords. His duties are similar to those of the Speaker in the House of Commons but these do not include maintaining order. He is a member of the Cabinet, heads a department which is responsible for the administration of the courts and presides over the House of Lords in its capacity as a court and is entitled to sit on appellate committees.

- **Mace**  
In the House of Commons, the Mace represents the power and authority that the monarchy has delegated to the House of Commons. The Mace lies on the Table in front of the Speaker when Members are debating. When the chamber is used as a committee, known as Committee of the Whole House, the Mace is put under the table. The Mace is carried in and out of the chamber by the Serjeant at Arms in a procession at the beginning and end of each day. Without the Mace in position, the House cannot sit and debate.
- **Manifesto**  
A public declaration of a party's ideas and policies, usually printed during the campaign. Once in power, a Government is often judged by how many of its manifesto promises it manages to deliver.
- **Marginal constituencies**  
Seats where the gap between the two or more leading parties is relatively small. Often regarded as less than a 10% margin i.e. requiring a swing of 5% or less, though very dependent on prevailing political conditions.
- **Master of the Rolls**  
He presides over the Court of Appeal in the House of Lords and is responsible for the records or rolls of the Chancery court.
- **Member of Parliament (MP)**  
An elected member to the House of Commons. Backbench MPs are those MPs who are neither a minister nor a spokesperson for their party.
- **Members of the House of Lords**  
The Members of the House of Lords consist of Hereditary Peers, Life Peers and Bishops. The public does not elect Members of the Lords - Hereditary Peers inherit their titles and Life Peers are appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister to serve for their life; the title is not transferable.
- **Ministerial Statements**  
With the permission of the Speaker, Ministers may make a statement to the House of Commons (or House of Lords), relating to the Government Department for which they have responsibility, which they feel it is necessary to address to the House. Examples include the storing of human organs at hospitals, the Lawrence inquiry, and statements defending a **Minister's conduct in matters which** have aroused concern.
- **Ministers**  
MPs or Peers who are in charge of Governmental departments and make up the Government. Senior Ministers such as the Secretaries of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer make up the Cabinet.
- **Minority Government**  
A Government formed by a party which does not have an absolute majority in the House of Commons. Harold Wilson led a Labour minority Government between February and October 1974.
- **Minute Room**  
The room where questions and Motions are tabled in the House of Lords.
- **Minutes and Proceedings**  
**Summary of previous day's proceedings** in the House of Lords (also contains Order Paper for the business of the day, future business and Written Questions).
- **Modernisation Committee**  
The Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons.
- **Monarch**  
The Palace of Westminster is a Royal palace and everything that is done there is done in **the Crown's name**. The Monarch is the Head of State and gives the Royal Assent to all new legislation. The Monarch appoints Life Peers (on **the Prime Minister's advice**), opens Parliament and dissolves it, and appoints the Prime Minister.
- **Money Bill**  
A Bill which is concerned exclusively with the raising or spending of public money.
- **Money Resolutions**  
After the second reading, before the committee stage, any Money Resolution required is usually dealt with, along with any Ways and Means Resolutions. A Money Resolution authorises any part of a Bill which involves a significant charge on central government funds. Money Resolutions and Ways and Means Resolutions are both debatable for a maximum of 45 minutes only if raised at a time other than immediately after the second reading.
- **Multipliers**  
The additional or second level effects of a programme.
- **Name**  
**"Naming of a Member"** is the term used to describe the disciplining of an MP for breaking the rules of the House of Commons.
- **National Assembly for Wales**  
The National Assembly for Wales was set up as part of the process of Devolution. In 1997 the Welsh people voted to set up the Assembly in a referendum. The new Assembly took over the responsibilities of the Welsh Office and had powers of secondary, but not primary, legislation. Further powers were allocated by the Government of Wales Act 2006, and **the Assembly may now pass "Measures of the National Assembly for Wales"**.

- **Negative Procedure**  
Some Statutory Instruments become law on the date stated on them but will be nullified if either House passes a Motion calling for their annulment within a certain time (usually 40 days including the day on which it was laid). Such a motion is known as a prayer.
- **Nomination papers**  
A candidate must be nominated on these documents by 10 voters living in the constituency.
- **Northern Ireland Assembly**  
The setting up of a Northern Ireland Assembly was agreed by the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum in 1998 as part of the policy of Devolution. The Assembly is also part of the peace initiative in Northern Ireland. After a number of suspensions, the Assembly was restored as provided for by the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Acts of 2006 and 2007.
- **Notices of Questions**  
The asking of an Oral question in the House of Commons is the end of a lengthy process. It begins two weeks earlier when the MP gives notice of his or her question. Notice must be less than ten days, to prevent out of date questions being asked. There is also a minimum period of notice of three days so that the Minister being questioned has time to prepare an answer.
- **Notional result**  
After major boundary changes like that in 1997, the main broadcasters agree how altered constituencies were likely to have voted in the previous election. This gives them a base against which to compare the new results.
- **Number 10**  
The official residence in Downing Street of the British prime minister since the 18th century. Number 10 and Downing Street both serve as terms to describe the Prime Minister and his or her inner circle, as in "Number 10 has said that".
- **Oath of Allegiance**  
See Swearing of Members.
- **Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)**  
The Government department responsible for neighbourhood renewal, housing and urban policy. The ODPM includes the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, the Regional Coordination Unit and the Social Exclusion Unit (review pending).
- **Official report**  
See Hansard.
- **Ombudsman**  
The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, or Parliamentary Ombudsman, investigates complaints from members of the public about Government Departments. The ombudsman has wide powers to obtain evidence from Government Departments and make recommendations about the cases he or she hears. Cases can be referred to the Ombudsman only by MPs.
- **Opinion poll**  
A survey asking people's opinion on one or more issues. In an election campaign, the key question is usually about which party people will vote for.
- **Opposition days**  
20 days are allotted in each session for proceedings on opposition business, of which 17 are at the disposal of the leader of the opposition, and three are at the disposal of the leader of the second-largest opposition party.
- **Opposition**  
The largest party not in Government is known as the official opposition. It receives extra Parliamentary funding in recognition of its status. They are called the Opposition because they sit on the benches opposite the Government in the House of Commons Chamber.
- **Oral questions**  
Questions must be tabled by a Member in person or by another Member acting on his or her behalf. A Member may table only one oral question on behalf of another for each Minister each day.
- **Order, Order**  
'Order, order' are the words that the Speaker calls out to regain control during a debate in the House of Commons.
- **Order Book**  
This is published daily and divided into two parts: Part 1 lists all questions for written answers on that day; Part 2 lists all the outstanding PQs for oral and written answers on future days, and other motions for future days.
- **Order Confirmation Bills**  
These are Bills that apply to Scotland only. The Secretary of State for Scotland issues a Provisional Order that has to be confirmed by Parliament. Order Confirmation Bills follow the pattern of Private Bills as they pass through Parliament.
- **Order of Business**  
The Order of Business lists business set down for each **day's sitting in the House** of Commons: it is in effect the House's agenda. It follows the normal order in which business is conducted, although not all items taken on the floor require to be notified in the Order of Business.

- **Orders in Council**  
Orders in Council are used when an ordinary Statutory Instrument would be inappropriate, such as for transferring responsibilities between Government Departments. Orders in Council are made by the Privy Council who are the only ones who have these powers. They often relate to the regulation of professions or professional bodies.
- **Orders of the Day**  
Orders of the day are items which the House of Commons has on the agenda for each day's business. The Orders of the Day are set out in the Order Paper, and the Clerk reads each one out as it is dealt with. Often, the House is unable to complete all the items on the agenda for that day. If this is the case, the items not reached or 'remaining orders of the day' are rescheduled.
- **Outputs and Outcomes**  
Outputs measure what the regeneration programme, such as additional training places or more houses directly produced. Outcomes measure the longer-term changes in an area that **improve people's lives**.
- **Pairing**  
Pairing is an arrangement where an MP of one party agrees with an MP of an opposing party not to vote in a particular division. This gives both MPs the opportunity not to attend on occasions. Such arrangements have to be registered with the Whips, who check that the agreement is stuck to. Pairing is not allowed in divisions of great political importance.
- **Palace of Westminster**  
The existing Palace of Westminster was built in 1870 and includes the Houses of Parliament. Today the building is on four levels housing offices, dining rooms, bars, meeting rooms, libraries and committee rooms. At either end are residences for the Speaker and the Lord Chancellor, and there are two great Towers: the Clock Tower (Big Ben) and the Victoria Tower.
- **Parliament Acts 1911, 1949**  
These restrict the powers of the Lords to amend money Bills or delay other Bills agreed by the Commons.
- **Parliamentary Agent**  
A Parliamentary agent promotes private Bills on behalf of organisations or acts for petitioners opposing a private Bill. Agents must be registered with the private Bill office.
- **Parliamentary Counsel**  
A Parliamentary counsel is responsible for drafting Government Bills and amendments to Bills and advising Government departments on all aspects of Parliamentary procedure.
- **Parliamentary Information Management Services (PIMS)**  
A comprehensive bibliography and index to all the proceedings and publications of the House of Commons, the House of Lords, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly, as well as to other information sources used by the Houses of Parliament.
- **Parliamentary Question**  
A question addressed to a Minister in the House of Commons (PQ) and to HM Government in the House of Lords, for answer orally on the Floor of the House or in writing in Hansard. Oral questions are best for gaining publicity for an issue as they are answered in person on the floor of the House. Written questions are used to obtain information and statistics from Government departments. On Wednesdays oral questions are put to the Prime Minister in the Prime Minister's question time.
- **Party Election Broadcast (PEB)**  
Broadcasts made by the parties and transmitted on TV or radio. By agreement with the broadcasters, each party is allowed a certain number according to its election strength and number of candidates fielded.
- **Party System**  
In Britain, the party system has evolved from the historical division of Whigs and Tories in the Stuart period. The Tories were the representatives of the Monarchy and Anglicanism and the Whigs were the aristocratic party of foreign expansion. Under Gladstone, the Whigs became the Liberal Party. The growth of the Labour Party led to the decline of the Liberals in the first part of the twentieth century but, since the 1970s, there have been increasing numbers of parties represented in the House of Commons. While Labour and Conservative have remained the largest parties, the Liberal Democrats have increased their strength, there are MPs from nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales and a number of Northern Ireland parties.
- **Peer**  
A member of the House of Lords.
- **Personation**  
The offence of impersonating someone else in order to use their vote.
- **Planning Policy Statements (PPS)**  
These are prepared by the Government after public consultation. PPSs explain statutory provisions and provide guidance to local authorities and others on planning policy and the operation of the planning system.

- **Point of order**  
A method whereby members bring supposed breaches of the House's rules of order to the Speaker's attention. Members may seek to raise them at any time, but the Speaker has discretion as to when to hear them, and will not normally do so during Question Time.
- **Poll**  
Another term for vote or election.
- **Polling clerk**  
The person in the polling station who checks the electoral register to verify that the voter is eligible to cast his vote and at that particular polling station.
- **Polling day**  
Election day.
- **Polling station**  
Location where people go to cast their votes.
- **Portcullis**  
The Portcullis with a crown on top has come to be accepted as the emblem of both the Houses of Parliament. As with many aspects of parliamentary life, this has developed through custom and usage.
- **Postal vote**  
People unable to get to a polling station are allowed to vote by post if they apply in advance. They are also allowed a proxy vote.
- **Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS)**  
This role is performed by an MP.
- **Parliamentary Privilege**  
Members of Parliament have some special rights that members of the public do not have. These are known as Parliamentary Privilege. These rights enable members to debate freely - for example an MP cannot be charged with libel for anything that he or she says in Parliament. It is important, therefore, that MPs use these rights responsibly and do not abuse them.
- **Prayers**  
Prayers are read at the beginning of each sitting of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. During prayers, the doors and galleries of the Houses are closed and strangers (visitors) are excluded.
- **Presentation Bill**  
A motion for leave to bring in a Bill made under standing order No 57. Member presents the Bill for first reading; there is no debate.
- **Presiding officer**  
The person responsible for ensuring the conduct of the ballot in polling stations. They have to ensure that ballot boxes are kept secure and are responsible for transferring them safely to the count.
- **Prime Minister**  
The Prime Minister is the leader of the country. He or she is the leader of the party that wins the most seats at a General Election. After a General Election, the Queen calls upon the leader of the largest party to form the Government. The Prime Minister chooses the other members of the Government, and has a residence and offices at 10 Downing Street. In Parliament, the Prime Minister sits on the Government Front Bench near the Despatch Box in the House of Commons. He or she is also an MP. The Prime Minister has powers to appoint judges, create Life Peers and make appointments to senior positions in the Church of England.
- **Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQ)**  
This is an opportunity for MPs from all parties to question the PM on any subject. It lasts for about 30 minutes and usually focuses on the key issues of the day. The Prime Minister answers questions every week that Parliament is in session.
- **Principal Private Secretary**  
This role is performed by a Civil Servant.
- **Private Bill**  
A Bill promoted by a body or an individual to give powers additional to, or in conflict with, the general law, and to which a separate procedure applies.
- **Private Member's Bill**  
A public Bill promoted by a member or peer who is not a member of the Government.
- **Private notice question**  
A question adjudged to be of urgent importance on submission to the Speaker, answered at the end of oral questions - usually at 3.30pm.
- **Privy Councillors**  
Privy Councillors are members of the Queen's own Council or Privy Council. Membership includes all members of the Cabinet, past and present, the Speaker, the leaders of all major political parties, Archbishops, and various senior judges, as well as other senior public figures. Their role is to advise the Queen in carrying out her duties as Monarch.
- **Programme Motion/Orders**  
A motion restricting time for one or more stages of a Bill, which has cross-party support.
- **Proportional representation**  
Systems of voting which aim to give parties the representation in a Parliament justified by their level of voting support. For example, if a party gained 40% of the total votes, a perfectly proportional system would allow them to gain 40% of the seats.

This would not usually be the case in the First Past the Post system.

- **Prorogation**  
The Act of ending a session of Parliament. Performed when an election is called. Following prorogation, all remaining business falls and has to be re-introduced afresh in the next session.
- **Proxy Vote**  
People unable to get to a polling station are allowed to appoint someone to vote on their behalf if they apply in advance. They are also allowed a postal vote.
- **Psephology**  
The study of voting and voting patterns.
- **Public Services**  
Services that are wholly or partly funded through taxation. They include national, regional and local Government and statutory agencies.
- **Queen's Speech**  
Speech prepared by the Government and given by the Queen at the State Opening of Parliament, announcing the legislation the Government intends to introduce in the forthcoming Parliament.
- **Question Time**  
The period set aside for questions to be asked and answered orally on the Floor of both Houses.
- **Quorum**  
If fewer than 40 members, including the occupant of the chair and the tellers, have participated in a Division, the House proceeds to the next business, and the business voted upon stands over until the next sitting. The Division is rendered inquorate.
- **Recall of Parliament**  
If there is an important development during a recess the House is recalled. For example, the House was recalled during the Gulf War and after the Northern Ireland agreement in 1998.
- **Recess**  
Parliament does not sit all year round. There are periods of recess when members can perform their other duties.
- **Recount**  
If a result is close, any candidate may ask for a recount. The process can be repeated several times if necessary until the candidates are satisfied. The returning officer has the final say on whether a recount takes place.
- **Referendum**  
A binding vote of the whole country on a single issue.
- **Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)**  
A total of nine agencies who promote regional economic development. They help regions to be more competitive and reduce imbalance both between different regions and within the same region.
- **Register of Lords' Interests**  
This is where members of the House of Lords declare the following kinds of outside interests.
  - Consultancy work which involves payment.
  - Financial interests in business that are involved in lobbying Parliament.
  - Any other interests which may **affect the public's opinion of the way in which the Lords carries out its duties.** (This is optional).
- **Register of Members' Interests**  
**The Register of Members' Interests** is where MPs declare any interests that they hold outside Parliament. Interests include outside jobs or consultancy work, gifts, or membership of organisations that might affect their position in Parliament.
- **Report stage**  
A debate on a Bill when the whole house looks at changes that have been made by the Standing Committee. Considerations for further amendment can be suggested.
- **Resilience**  
The ability to detect, prevent and respond to all kinds of emergency.
- **Returning officer**  
The official in charge of elections in each of the constituencies.
- **Royal Assent**  
The final stage of legislation when the royal seal of approval is formally given and a Bill becomes an Act.
- **Royal Commission**  
A Royal Commission is a group of people appointed by the Government to investigate a matter of important public concern, and to make recommendations on any actions to be taken.
- **Safe seat**  
A constituency in which the holding party has a big lead to defend. Often regarded as being a margin of 15-20% or more.
- **Scottish Enterprise**  
The main Government agency for economic development in Scotland.
- **Scottish Executive/Parliament**  
The devolved Government for Scotland. It is responsible for most of the issues of day-to-day concern to the people of Scotland, including health, education, justice, rural affairs, and transport and manages an annual budget of around £20 Billion.

- **Second Reading**  
When the general principles of a Bill are debated in Parliament for the first time.
- **Second Reading Committees**  
Second Reading Committees are occasionally set up to consider the principles of a Bill, in the same way that the House itself does on a second reading. The purpose of this is to save time in the Chamber. Only non-controversial Bills are referred to the committee.
- **Secondary Legislation** Ministers use a statutory instrument to amend existing primary legislation (acts.) Statutory instruments may need to be debated and voted on by both Houses but often they become law simply if no MPs or Peers oppose them.
- **Secretary of State**  
This is the title held by the more important Ministers, for example the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
- **Section 106 agreements** (s.75 in Scotland) Negotiated agreements to provide, for example, low cost housing or community facilities in return for the granting of planning permission.
- **Select Committee**  
A committee established by both Houses to inquire into particular matters or subject area and to report back their findings to the relevant House.
- **Select Committees (departmental)**  
Appointed for the duration of a Parliament to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the main Government departments and amendments to Bills.
- **Select Committee on European Legislation**  
The Select Committee on European Legislation is a House of Commons committee established to examine proposals from the European Union, in order to inform the House about any which raise issues of legal or political importance. It is more usually known as the European Scrutiny Committee.
- **Serjeant at Arms**  
The Serjeant at Arms is responsible for maintaining order in the Chamber, Galleries, Committee Rooms and precincts of the House of Commons, and the control of access to them. By tradition, the post is usually given to an ex-serviceman, and the Serjeant at Arms is the only person in the House of Commons allowed to carry a sword.
- **Session**  
Session is the word used to describe the Parliamentary year. A Session begins with the State Opening of Parliament, usually in November, and finishes the following November when Parliament is prorogued. These dates can change if the Government calls a General Election, depending on the date of the election.
- **Shadow Cabinet**  
Senior MPs from the chief opposition party who would probably form the Government if they came into power after a general election.
- **Single Transferable Vote**  
The Single Transferable Vote (STV) is a proportional voting system that is designed to give the voter maximum freedom of choice. The elector lists candidates in order of preference in a multi-member constituency. A candidate is elected once his votes reach the relevant quota, and any excess votes over this quota are then transferred, according to the second preferences of the voters. Candidates with insufficient votes are eliminated and their preferences transferred until all the seats in the constituency are filled. Voters can choose between candidates of the same party as well as between those of different parties.
- **Sitting**  
The House of Commons normally sits on Monday and Tuesday from 2.30 p.m. to 10.30 p.m., on Wednesday from 9.30 a.m. to 10.30 p.m. with a break from 2.00–2.30 p.m., on Thursday from 11.30 a.m. to 7.30 p.m., and on Fridays from 9.30 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.. The finishing times are not fixed and are often later. The House of Lords normally sits Mondays to Wednesdays from 2.30 p.m., and on Thursdays from 3.00 p.m., and rises when business is finished, not at a fixed time.
- **SO (standing order) No 24 application**  
A means whereby a Member may attempt to initiate an emergency debate, by interrupting business to discuss a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration. If the Speaker is satisfied that the matter is proper to be so discussed, a motion is put to the House. If the House gives leave, the business is discussed, usually on the following day.
- **Soapbox**  
Famously used by John Major in 1992 to address crowds of voters as he travelled around the country.

- **Speaker**  
An MP elected by other members of the Commons to chair debates and deal with the running of the Commons. By tradition, an MP who is Speaker is not opposed by any of the main parties at elections.
- **Speaker's Chaplain**  
**The Speaker's Chaplain is a member of the Clergy who leads Prayers before each sitting of the House of Commons.**
- **Speaker's Counsel**  
Officers of the House of Commons who are lawyers providing legal advice to the Speaker and to certain Committees of the House.
- **Speaker's Procession**  
**The Speaker's Procession takes place on every day that the House of Commons sits. It starts at the Speaker's residence and finishes in the House of Commons Chamber. Once the Speaker and the mace are in position, the business of the House can begin.**
- **Spin**  
The attempt to place a favourable interpretation on an event so that people or the media will interpret it in that way. Those performing this Act are known as spin doctors.
- **Spoiled Ballots**  
Ballot papers which have been filled in incorrectly. The returning officer has the final say over whether any paper not marked with a single cross is valid.
- **Stages of Legislation**  
Legislation goes through a number of stages before it becomes law. These are the same in both Houses. Bills (other than Money Bills) can start in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. They go through the following stages in each House, though with important procedural differences in both Houses:
  - First Reading
  - Second Reading
  - Committee Stage
  - Report Stage
  - Third Reading

Once the Bill has completed these stages in one of the Houses, the process is repeated in the other. After this, any amendments from the second House are considered by the first. When both Houses agree on a Bill, then it is presented to the Queen for Royal Assent.
- **Standing Committee**  
Constituted to consider public Bills in detail, clause by clause. Membership is determined by the selection committee, and is established for each Bill. A standing committee is formed on an ad-hoc basis to debate specific legislation and is made up of around 20 MPs.
- **Standing Committee on European Legislation**  
From 1990–91, documents recommended by the European Legislation Committee for further consideration by the House have been referred to one of three European Standing Committees (A, B and C). Each Sitting lasts for up to 2.5 hours. Each Committee consists of thirteen members nominated for the duration of a session. The Chairman is chosen from **the chairman's panel and may change from sitting to sitting.**
- **Standing Order**  
An order made by the House (Commons or Lords) for the regulation of its proceedings. There are many Standing Orders for all of the different procedures of Parliament. The rules cover very different things, from the language that members may use in Parliament to the calling of an emergency debate.
- **Starred Question**  
Oral question on the House of Lords.
- **State opening of Parliament**  
The State Opening of Parliament takes place after a General Election and at the beginning of each new session of Parliament. On the day, the Queen arrives in the Irish State Coach from Buckingham Palace and enters the Palace of Westminster by her own route, the Sovereign's Entrance, which is under the Victoria Tower. From there she goes into the Royal Robing Room where she puts on her Crown and ceremonial robes. She then processes through the Royal Gallery to take her place on the Throne in the House of Lords. The chamber is full and all of the Lords present wear their Parliamentary robes. Black Rod is sent to the House of Commons to summon MPs to the Lords. When Black Rod arrives the door is always slammed in his face, and he has to knock three times on the door before he is admitted - a tradition that symbolises the right of the Commons to debate without interference. MPs then process into the House of Lords but remain behind the bar of the House. The Lord Chancellor hands the speech to the Queen who then reads it out.
- **Statutory Instruments**  
In order to prevent the need for an Act of Parliament every time a detail needs to be updated or added to, an Act can give the Government the power to do this at a later stage. The powers themselves are called Statutory Instruments and have the full force of law. The laws made through these powers are also known as Secondary Legislation (the parent act is also known as Primary Legislation) or Delegated Legislation.

- **Strangers**  
Anyone who is not a Member, officer or official of the House of Commons.
- **Supplementary Question**  
The first question asked during Question Time would have been tabled and the text of the question set out on the Order of Business. After the Minister has answered the question, further exchanges are unscripted. The Member who asked the original question is normally the first to be called to ask a follow-up question, or supplementary. Then others may be called to put supplementaries, usually alternating between Government and Opposition sides of the house.
- **Swearing of Members**  
At the start of a new Parliament or after a by-election, members take the oath holding the New Testament (or in the case of a Jew or Muslim, the Old Testament or Koran) and say the words of the oath (which are on a card held by a clerk). Members may also take the oath in the Scottish manner - take an alternative form of oath or make a solemn affirmation instead of an oath.
- **Swing**  
The transfer of votes from one party to another. The actual transfer is complicated, so usually taken to mean between the top two parties in any seat or area.
- **Table Office**  
Situated outside the Chamber, behind **the Speakers' Chair where PQs, EDMs and Motions are 'tabled'**.
- **Table of the House**  
The Table of the House is the table in each of the chambers of the House of Lords and House of Commons which lies between the Government and Opposition Front Benches. It is the place where the Clerks sit to look after the administration of the House. In the House of Commons, it is also where the Mace is kept when the House is sitting.
- **Tactical voting**  
This is when people vote not for the party they really support, but for another party in order to keep out a more disliked rival.
- **Target seats**  
In theory, any seat that a party contests and held by a rival is one of its targets. In practice, a target seat is one that a party believes it can win and puts a lot of effort into doing so.
- **Tellers**  
Representatives of parties who wait outside polling stations and ask people for their number on the electoral roll. This is to help the parties ensure all their supporters have voted. Tellers have no official status and no-one is obliged to give them any information.
- **Ten-minute rule Bill** - colloquial term for standing order No 23, under which backbenchers have an opportunity on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to introduce a Bill and speak in its favour for about ten minutes. Time is also available for a short opposing speech.
- **Third Reading**  
The final opportunity for debating a Bill in its amended form before it is sent to the House of Lords or for Royal Assent.
- **Third Sector**  
Non-Governmental organisations with cultural, social and environmental objectives. It includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals, and housing associations.
- **Turnout**  
The number or percentage of people eligible to vote who actually do so.
- **Unprinted Commons Papers**  
A few papers, about 15–20 each year, are presented by Command but not printed in the Command Paper series, and they are not usually available from The Stationery Office. These are termed Unprinted Command Papers and include such items as the BBC & Sports Council Annual Report.
- **Unprinted Papers**  
Unprinted Papers are papers laid before the House but not ordered to be printed by it as House of Commons Papers. They include a large number of Statutory Instruments, reports of nationalised industries, and some accounts etc. Many of these papers are actually published by the Stationery Office or the organisations concerned. Unprinted papers are public documents and can be consulted by the public in the House of Lords Record Office without restriction, and copied or faxed by the House of Commons Information Office (for which a fee is payable).
- **Unstarred Question**  
A short debate in the House of Lords taken at end of business for the day
- **Urgent Question**  
A question asked at short notice to elicit a statement from a Government Minister.
- **Usual Channels**  
Discussions which take place between Whips of each Parties in both Houses.
- **Vote bundle**  
This includes the order paper, giving the agenda for the current day's sitting, lists of Parliamentary proceedings, notices of meetings of standing and select committees, amendments tabled to public Bills, a summary of the proceedings of standing committees that sat the previous day.

- **Votes and proceedings**  
The daily minute of the House of Commons (Proceedings Minute Paper in the House of Lords).
- **Ways and Means Resolutions**  
After the second reading, before the committee stage, any Ways and Means Resolution required is usually dealt with, along with any Money Resolutions. Ways and Means Resolutions are needed to authorise the levying of taxes or other charges. Money Resolutions and Ways and Means Resolutions are both debatable for a maximum of 45 minutes only if raised at a time other than immediately after the second reading.
- **Weekly Agenda**  
Publication giving details of future meetings of House of Lords Select Committees and details of current enquiries.
- **Weekly Information Bulletin (WIB)**  
The Weekly Information Bulletin, or WIB, is published each week and sets out the forthcoming business of both Houses, and a wide range of additional information about their work.
- **West Lothian Question**  
Shorthand term coined to describe a question posed by Tam Dalyell, once Labour MP for West Lothian. Mr Dalyell asks how it is right that post-devolution, Scottish MPs can vote at Westminster on matters solely to do with England, while English MPs do not have the same influence on that issue in Scotland, as it has been devolved to the Scottish Parliament.
- **Westminster Hall**  
Sittings in "Westminster Hall" (actually in the room up the staircase in the north-west corner of Westminster Hall) constitute sittings of the House (effectively a parallel Chamber), and any member may take part. Debates are held on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.
- **Westminster**  
A term used to describe the hothouse of politics centred around the Palace of Westminster and its surroundings.
- **Whigs**  
The Whig party was the predecessor of the Liberal Party.
- **Whip System**  
Whips are MPs or Peers appointed by each party to maintain party discipline. In a sense, they are personnel managers who convey information between party leaders and back bench members. Part of their role, however, is to ensure that members of their party vote in the way that their party would like in important divisions.
- **White Paper**  
Technically, a UK Government publication, usually a prelude to legislation, although it is used to mean any technical document, sometimes experimental, on a subject.
- **Withdrawal of the Whip**  
If a party withdraws the Whip from an MP, it effectively isolates the MP from the party machinery within the House. A Member does not lose his or her seat as a result of the Whip being withdrawn, and they usually continue to sit as an independent until the Whip is restored.
- **Will Write Letters**  
Occasionally questions put to Government Departments for written **answer may be answered "I will write to the Hon Member ..."**. Such replies are not published in Hansard but placed in **the House of Commons Library for MPs'** use. Members of the public who want to see the reply should write to the Government Department that answered the question.
- **Woolsack**  
The Woolsack is the seat of the Lord Chancellor in the House of Lords. It is a large square cushion of wool covered in red cloth. It has no arms or back.
- **Writ**  
Form of written command in the name of the monarch.
- **Writs of election**  
Once Parliament has been dissolved, a writ of election is issued for each constituency formally announcing the poll.
- **Yeomen of the Guard**  
The Yeomen of the Guard are a military corps founded by Henry VII in 1485. Since then, they have been the bodyguard of the Monarch, although their duties today are purely ceremonial. They wear a distinctive red uniform dating back to Tudor times and are more often known by the name of Beefeaters.

## Further Information

This guide is for general interest - it is always essential to take advice on specific issues.

We believe that the facts are correct as at the date of publication, but there may be certain errors and omissions for which we cannot be responsible.

## Acknowledgement

<sup>1</sup> This glossary is based on the glossary provided by the UK Parliament at [www.justis.com/help/parlgloss-index.html](http://www.justis.com/help/parlgloss-index.html) with additions from other sources.

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