

# The case for parliamentary reform

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## Introduction

This report makes the case that the procedures and processes of the House of Commons are in urgent need of reform. This is hardly a new observation. However, at a time of austerity, the extent of the inefficiency, together with the financial cost to the taxpayer of such time-wasting processes, take on a new, more urgent significance.

The reforms outlined below would be straight-forward and cost-effective to achieve. Some build on previous proposals from the Wright Committee<sup>1</sup> and from the Select Committee<sup>2</sup> on Modernisation of the House of Commons<sup>3</sup>. Some have been agreed in the past, but not implemented. A few are new proposals, drawn in particular from experience in other legislatures. Others were rejected by previous Parliaments at a different time. A new Parliament, in new circumstances, should examine them again.

Among the report's proposals are:

- The introduction of electronic voting, which it is estimated could save 1.5 hours or more<sup>4</sup> of MPs' time a week. This time costs over £30,000 in salary costs per week and could be put to far better use.<sup>5</sup> Put another way, it takes about 15 minutes per vote and in the last Parliament there were over 1200 votes<sup>6</sup>, meaning an MP with

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmrefhoc/1117/111702.htm> .

<sup>2</sup> A Commons Select Committee is a small group of MPs from different parties charged with investigating a policy area or issue: <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/committees/select/>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmmodern/779/77903.htm> .

<sup>4</sup> Based on 10 votes in a week, each taking 15 minutes.

<sup>5</sup> Workings for over £30,000 figure: MPs Salary = £65,738 / 52 = £1264 Weekly wage. Hourly wage on a 40 hour wk (most MPs work well in excess of 40 hours - I am using 40 hours as this is the average length of a working week as laid out in standard Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority contracts) 1264/40 = £31.60, so an MP's salary is 53p a minute. If each vote takes 15 minutes, 15 x 53p = £7.90. Multiply this by the number of MPs £7.90 x 650 = £5136. If there are 10 divisions a week this costs = £51,360 in MPs salaries. Presuming votes on four days with Friday as a constituency day, and that voting electronically still took 15 minutes a day, this would save 1.5 hours in MPs salaries = £30,816.

<sup>6</sup> Source: HC Library Research Paper 2009/69 *Parliamentary Trends*, Sessional Information Digest

an 85 per cent voting record would have spent over 250 hours just queuing up to vote.<sup>7</sup>

- A systematic overhaul of Parliamentary language to make it self-explanatory, thus demystifying parliamentary processes, and increasing transparency and accountability.
- Measures to prevent the “talking out” of Private Members’ Bills.
- Increased transparency so MPs (and their constituents) know in advance if they have been selected to speak in a debate. Greater use by the Speaker (“Speaker” means the person in charge of the Commons Chamber, not the MP speaking!) on limits on backbench speaking time.
- An end to late night sittings to make MPs hours and those of Parliamentary staff more family friendly, potentially saving significant amounts in staff costs and overheads.

At a time when the political process is struggling to regain its legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the public, it is more vital than ever that Parliament can demonstrate that its work is efficient, transparent, and accountable. Now is the time to shake off the image (and in some cases, the reality) of the “old boys’ club”, and to move Westminster into the twenty first century. The reforms outlined below are a first step in that process. They are by no means exhaustive, and there are many other wider reforms that are needed, such as the proposal for MPs to have the option to job-share. However, they offer a starting point for debate.

It is very welcome that House of Commons Procedure Committee is conducting an inquiry into MPs sitting hours and (following the first ever Backbench Business Committee<sup>8</sup> debate on 20 July 2010) an inquiry on the release of information by Ministers<sup>9</sup>. I will be submitting the proposals in this report to the Procedure Committee.

The report has also been sent to the Speaker of the House, and to Party Leaders. My intention in publishing it more widely is to help build public support for change. Experience shows that when the spotlight of public attention is shone on some of the more archaic practices of the House, the momentum for change will grow.

Caroline Lucas MP  
November 2010

## Note to the reader

I have attempted to write this report with a spirit of openness and accessibility so that it is understandable for voters as well as people in the “Westminster village”. I have used footnotes to help explain commonly used but not self-explanatory Parliamentary terms.

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<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp2009/rp09-069.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> 85% of 1200 = 1020 x 15mins = 255 hours.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2010/06/mps-agree-to-establish-a-backbench-business-committee/>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/procedure-committee/>.

## Recommendations

1. Introduction of electronic voting in the Chamber (and in the voting lobbies) using hand held electronic devices (pages 4-6).
2. The 'holding over' of votes so that there is a specified time for voting at the end of each Parliamentary day (page 6).
3. An option to record an abstention on a vote and replication of the European Parliament's 'Explanations of votes' website (pages 6-7).
4. An obligatory short explanatory paragraph of the effect of any amendment to legislation to be printed underneath each amendment for stages of a Bill taken in the Commons Chamber (pages 7-8).
5. For debates in the Commons Chamber, the list of those selected to speak should be made available to MPs in advance and the Commons should consider new rules on who is selected to speak and speaking time limits (page pages 8-9).
6. A systematic modernisation of the language of Parliament (page 9).
7. Measures to prevent the "talking out" of Private Members' legislation (page 10).
8. Power for the Speaker to call Ministers to give an oral statement to the Commons on matters of urgent or national importance (pages 10-11).
9. An end to late night sittings to make MPs hours and those of parliamentary staff fit better with family life (pages 11-12).

# 1. Electronic voting in the Chamber

- 1.1 Many aspects of the way that the House of Commons runs are archaic and wasteful of both time and finances. We need to modernise Parliament and make it more efficient.
- 1.2 For example, the process of casting each vote takes at least 12-15 minutes. If there are several votes during the day/evening, this can mean that the act of simply voting takes well over an hour, and sometimes nearer two, with Members running backwards and forwards whenever the bell rings indicating a vote. Compare this to the European Parliament where all the votes are done at once at a specified time, known in advance, at the click of a button.
- 1.3 For some, there is an understandable desire to hold on to traditional ways, but an appeal to custom cannot justify the waste of time involved with the Commons archaic voting process. The time votes will be held is often totally unpredictable. On most sitting days there is at least one vote and there can be four, five or more votes in a day. On the days with multiple votes, all the time spent slowly filing through the 'aye' and the 'no' lobbies, could be spent actually scrutinising legislation, meeting constituents or dealing with some of the hundreds of communications that MPs receive each day.
- 1.4 Making the process of casting votes less time-consuming would make it possible for MPs to vote on more aspects of a Bill. This means the public would have a clearer record upon which to hold MPs to account. A system which inherently discourages voting on the specifics of the Bill requires less thought from those who are charged with passing the legislation. Speeding up voting should help to address this problem.
- 1.5 The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons issued a consultation paper to MPs on Voting Methods in 1998. The results of the consultation showed that just over half of the 64% of MPs who responded “preferred” the traditional voting method and 70% of respondents considered it “acceptable”.
- 1.6 In 1998, one of the reasons that some Members supported the current system was concern over losing the opportunity to speak informally with Ministers in the lobbies.
- 1.7 Others objected in principle to any system using fingerprint recognition which was one of the systems put forward in the consultation. 36% of Members did not express a view when they were asked in 1998. We now have a new intake, and many Members with whom I have spoken would like to see reform.
- 1.8 A technically feasible electronic alternative for voting in Parliament exists. The important benefits of backbenchers meeting Members of the Government in the voting lobbies does not have to be lost if an e-voting system were adopted. E voting is used in both the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish National Parliament; the European Parliament has voted electronically for decades; the French legislate with a show of hands, checked if necessary with an electronic ballot<sup>10</sup>; and the US

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/connaissance/fiches\\_synthese/fiche\\_45.asp](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/connaissance/fiches_synthese/fiche_45.asp).

Congress can cast their votes electronically<sup>11</sup>. The House of Commons should catch up.

- 1.9 More information on which countries do and which do not utilise e-voting systems is contained in the chart in Appendix 1 on page 16.
- 1.10 After discussion with industry experts<sup>12</sup> who have supplied e-voting systems, it is clear that a workable system could be made secure for the Commons. A hand-held electronic voting device could be kept near each seat in the Commons, with access to additional devices for Members who did not have a seat, as there are more Members than seats. Members without a seat could use their device in the voting lobbies.
- 1.11 To identify the MP who is voting, Members' current security passes could be modified to allow them to be inserted into the handheld device. TV monitors would have details of the vote and Members could simply press 1 to indicate for, 2 to indicate against or 3 to abstain. After a short period a Speaker in the Chamber and in each voting lobby would announce each amendment to be voted on and the results in turn.

## **Security, cost and access to Ministers**

- 1.12 This system would be secure as the technology can allow the readers to work in very accurately defined spaces, like the Chamber and voting lobbies and not beyond, so the effectiveness of the current security that sees only Members allowed in the Chamber/voting lobbies would continue.
- 1.13 If an MP lost their pass/smart card the Clerk's would hold a secure spare which could be made available to the Member at short notice. To prevent any Member passing their cards to a Whip or other MP, either biometric identifiers could be considered or, if MPs reject biometrics, a clear penalty for any such fraud which would make it not worth the risk. For example defrauding an MP's electronic vote could potentially trigger a by-election.
- 1.14 If the Commons chose a pre existing electronic voting keypad system, the keypads and related software and hardware would cost in the region of £400k<sup>13</sup>, less than 0.1% of the £434million cost of running the Commons in the last financial year<sup>14</sup>.
- 1.15 However, the value for money that such a system would bring would quickly justify a one-off cost on this scale. If, through a more efficient voting method, MPs are saved even half an hour a day, over a week this would free up hours for more effective scrutiny of legislation and so provide the taxpayer with considerably better value for the money paid for MPs salaries. For example if a voting process

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<sup>11</sup> <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/lawsmade.bysec/consideration.html#voting>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.iml.co.uk/>.

<sup>13</sup> Based on an estimate from industry experts, IML, *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> From the Office of the Chief Executive of the House of Commons: the running costs of Parliament in financial year 2009/10 are £434 million for the Commons and £112 for the Lords. With effect from 7 May the "running costs" would also cover IPSA, which is responsible for paying MPs' salaries and pensions.

takes 15 minutes using the current snails pace division system, it costs the taxpayer £5136<sup>15</sup> for MPs salaries for each vote under the current system. The proposal would also be likely to reduce staffing and other associated costs.

1.16 Since e-voting would still require MPs to come to the Chamber, the opportunity to catch up informally with Government Ministers would not be lost.

## **2. The holding of votes at one efficient time**

2.1 To deliver the time-saving that would make Parliament a more streamlined working environment, an e-voting system would need to be combined with the “holding over” of a day’s votes to the end of the day. In 1998, the Modernisation Select Committee provided an explanation of what this means<sup>16</sup> when it noted that “Members seemed interested in the possibility of holding divisions over, so that all votes could be taken one after another at a convenient time, instead of holding divisions immediately at the end of each debate”. Despite this finding, little has changed, and taxpayers’ money is still being wasted by votes being held at separate, unspecified times.

2.2 Although 2004 saw the introduction of “deferred divisions”, where some votes which would otherwise take place after the end of the days’ sitting are held over to be conducted in writing over Wednesday morning and early afternoon, this option is seldom used in practice. During the last six months, for example, it has only happened on two occasions.

2.3 It is also important to acknowledge that for some votes where there is a high degree of public interest, for example the vote on the Iraq War in 2003 or the decision to bring in tuition fees in 2004, MPs would want to vote immediately after a debate is over. This could be at the discretion of the Speaker, and announced to MPs and the public as far in advance as possible.

## **3. Recording of abstentions and an opportunity for MPs to explain how they have voted**

3.1 There is no formal opportunity for MPs to record an abstention or to explain how they have voted. The names of MPs who are present in the Chamber for the debate

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<sup>15</sup> Workings for over £30,000 figure: MPs Salary = £65,738 / 52 = £1264 Weekly wage. Hourly wage on a 40 hour wk (most MPs work well in excess of 40 hours - I am using 40 hours as this is the average length of a working week as laid out in standard Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority contracts) 1264/40 = £31.60, so an MP’s salary is 53p a minute. If each vote takes 15 minutes, 15 x 53p = £7.90. Multiply this by the number of MPs £7.90 x 650 = £5136. If there are 10 divisions a week this costs = £51,360 in MPs salaries. Presuming votes on four days with Friday as a constituency day, and that voting electronically still took 15 minutes a day, this would save 1.5 hours in MPs salaries = £30,816.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmmodern/779/77903.htm>.



but who do not vote are unrecorded, just as if they had been absent from the House.

- 3.2 The only option that Members currently have if they want to show that they were present but choose to abstain on is to vote both for and against. This is something that Richard Taylor, former independent MP for Wyre Forest and the independent minded late David Taylor MP for North West Leicestershire were both known for doing. However, their admirable attempts to record their abstentions were often misunderstood, with the press unfairly ridiculing them for not being able to make up their minds.
- 3.3 In 1998 a majority of MPs “indicated strong or general support” for an option to record an abstention<sup>17</sup>, yet 12 years later nothing has been done.
- 3.4 The Commons could also replicate the European Parliament's “Explanations of votes” website (please see the footnote below for a link to an example page)<sup>18</sup>. MEPs can (but do not have to) post a short paragraph on why they voted as they did for constituents to read. This is an effective way to provide the public with an explanation of why a Member voted the way they did.

## **4. Opening up the process - explanation of Amendments**

- 4.1 It is quite right that MPs should, as much as possible, listen and contribute to debates in the Main Chamber. However, being an effective MP involves many other tasks, including responsibilities to undertake work on Committees, to attend debates in the parallel second Chamber in Westminster Hall, and to chair and attend meetings. As a result, MPs do not and frequently cannot sit in the Commons Chamber all of the time that debate is going on.
- 4.2 The current system does not make it easy for MPs to know exactly what they are voting on when the bell summoning them to vote goes. Many MPs just do what they are told by their Party hierarchy (the whips), but they might be less inclined to do so if there was a simple explanation of the effect of each amendment under consideration.
- 4.3 A simple explanation would substantially increase transparency e.g.: "The effect of this amendment is to remove the provisions of the Bill that allow for the privatisation of Royal Mail." At the moment if an MP or a constituent wanted to know what the above amendment means, they would have to go separately to the Bill, look up the clause and then possibly go to the explanatory notes of the Bill to try and make sense of it.
- 4.4 Currently there are very helpful “Explanatory Notes” produced for every Bill but no such explanatory notes are provided on the effect of amendments to Bills being considered by the whole House. This could be easily remedied.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmmodern/779/77903.htm> Paragraph 3.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20101111&secondRef=ITEM-009&language=EN&ring=A7-2010-0171#4-192>.

- 4.5 In the House of Commons it is possible to add an explanatory note during Public Bill Committees (a small Committee of MPs that consider a Bill in detail before the Bill comes back to the Commons Chamber for the next stage). However, it is *not* currently authorised in Committee of the Whole House or the Report stage of the Bill (stages where all MPs are considering a Bill), which is where it would be particularly useful, since many Members are likely to be unfamiliar with the detailed amendments under consideration.
- 4.6 The mechanism to add a short explanatory note should remain optional for Public Bill Committees as arguably the small Committee of MPs should be expert in the Bill anyway. However, for the stages of a Bill which can be taken on the floor of the House, and for which amendments can be voted on by all 650 MPs, the provision of a short note explaining the effect of an amendment should be obligatory. Rules should put the onus on the Member to provide this explanation to the Clerks in the Public Bill Office.
- 4.7 This will give a little more power to backbenchers and take a little from their whips. It would also enable constituents to follow better the proceedings of the House, some of which are currently inaccessible.
- 4.8 The mandatory printing of a short explanation of the effect of amendment would impose some small additional printing costs. There would also possibly be some extra demand on the time of the Clerks to check that the explanation of the effect of an amendment provided by Members was accurate. However, much of this checking needs to be done anyway during the process of drafting an amendment.
- 4.9 The benefits of MPs and the public knowing what is being voted on, as described above, would far outweigh the marginal additional printing and Bill Office staff costs.

## **5. Clearer rules on speaking time in debates and the rules for who is selected to speak in a Commons debate**

- 5.1 On occasion more Members want to speak in a debate than is possible in the time available. The way the system works now, MPs have to send a letter to the Speaker<sup>19</sup> to indicate their wish to speak. The Speaker and his deputies then draw up a list for their own reference, of who is to speak and in what order. However, most MPs are not privy to this list, and can spend 4-5 hours in the Chamber, unsure of whether they will be called to speak or not.
- 5.2 The list of prospective speakers should be published as soon as it is drawn up to enable Members to both contribute to debates in the Chamber and attend other Parliamentary meetings.
- 5.3 Reform on the speaking time limits could start with a rethink of Standing Order 47 (Standing Orders are written rules under which Parliament conducts its business)

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<sup>19</sup> "Speaker" means the person in charge of the Commons Chamber, not the MP speaking.



which sets out the current rules on time limits on speeches for both front and back-bench Members.

- 5.4 The Chamber should be asked to debate and approve written guidelines, including criteria for the Speaker's decisions on which Members have been selected to contribute to the debate and in what order (for example, MPs with a particular interest or responsibility on the issue being debated rather than, for example, length of service) and on whether to set a limit on backbench speeches.
- 5.5 Under the current system, there are too many debates where MPs who wish to speak are not able to. New rules could include an open, published, mechanism for giving notice of the wish to speak rather than an informal behind the scenes note to the Speaker. The purpose of this would be to help MPs see how the selection and time-limit process is working.
- 5.6 Revised rules should work to ensure that where a Member has given notice by a reasonable time, they should wherever possible be given the opportunity to speak. Most Members would rather have the certainty of three minutes of speaking time as opposed to a possibility of either six minutes or no time at all.

## **6. More accessible language**

- 6.1 MPs should be able to refer to each other in debate as "Mrs Smith", "John Jones", &c, making proceedings more intelligible without reducing the necessary formality (and without changing the practice of speaking through the Chair).
- 6.2 I would also like to see a systematic overhaul of the language of the procedures and offices of the House based on the principle that it should be self explanatory and easily understandable for the public. For example, despite the fact that it makes little sense to those outside Westminster, in the Commons we say 'Division' to mean a vote through the lobbies; "Prorogation" to mean the period between the end of a session of Parliament and the State Opening of Parliament that begins the next session; "Early Day Motion" to refer to a motion that will almost certainly not get debated; "Adjournment" to mean that the Chamber should stop sitting for that day; "Recess" to mean the Chamber is not sitting for an extended time for example over the Summer or Christmas; a "Prayer" to mean a formal motion to oppose secondary legislation; "sub-judice" to mean under consideration by the Courts; and "Maiden" speech to mean first speech.
- 6.3 This kind of language is not accessible to the public and keeps the world of Parliament at a distance from those it is supposed to serve.

## **7. Preventing the ‘Talking out’ of Private Members’ Bills**

- 7.1 Private Members’ Bills<sup>20</sup> (PMBs) are Bills introduced by MPs who aren't government Ministers. They are held on Fridays, the day when most MPs go back for meetings in their constituencies. For an opposed Private Members’ Bill to go through on Second Reading, 100 Members must be in the House to support it. Given the constituency commitments of MPs, there are rarely 100 MPs in Westminster on a Friday (please see end of section 9 on MPs working hours for a proposal to move PMBs to a mid-week slot).
- 7.2 MPs that have stayed for a PMB on a Friday often start to head back to their constituencies for meetings later in the day, so the longer the debate goes on, the slimmer the chances of enough MPs remaining to vote it through. The current system allows backbenchers to deliberately waste the time allotted for debate on a Private Members’ Bill in order to delay it, so that the vote takes place when there are likely to be fewer Members to support it.
- 7.3 A recent example was on 12 November, when Tory backbenchers tried to “filibuster” or talk out the Sustainable Livestock Bill. Between them they sought to hamper the Bill by talking for long as possible, using process not argument - one stood and read out poetry, for example. This meant that the vote on the Bill happened much later than would have been the case if only real debate had occurred, and as a result MPs who supported the Bill had by that time left for meetings in their constituencies.
- 7.4 Reform of the timing of PMBs is needed, with consideration given to timetabling them earlier in the week, but the act of talking out a Bill must also be addressed. It is an insult to other Members who want to seriously debate the Bill, to the Speaker and most importantly to the electorate, who do not want to pay to run a debating Chamber that is being mocked by its participants.
- 7.5 There should be explicit rules which prevent the practice of talking out a Bill. The Wright Committee<sup>21</sup> stated that “merely procedural devices” should not be able to obstruct Private Members’ Bills and referred to the popular proposition that a maximum of three hours should be given for any Private Members’ Bill Second Reading debate. This should be cumulative in successive sittings, after which the question would be put to the Chamber on whether the Bill should receive a Second Reading. This would render pointless the act of “filibustering”.

## **8. Power for the Speaker to call Ministers to give an oral statement to the Commons**

- 8.1 The Chamber should give the Speaker the power to call upon a Secretary of State or the Prime Minister to give an oral statement to the House on matters of urgent public interest.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/Bills/private-members/>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmrefhoc/1117/111702.htm> paras 193-4.

8.2 At present, if the Government does not propose a statement itself on a matter of immediate public interest, and if the official opposition or other backbenchers do not submit an Urgent Question<sup>22</sup> to the Speaker for a debate on that issue, there is no means by which the Speaker can ensure there is a debate. Giving this discretion to the Speaker would provide a mechanism which would help hold the Government in the public interest.

## 9. More efficient working hours

9.1 Costs could also be saved by starting proceedings in the House earlier in the day on Tuesdays and Wednesdays (Mondays and Thursdays are discussed separately below) so that the House does not have to pay the additional staff and resource costs of late sittings. This change would also be family friendly and open up Parliament to people with young families.

9.2 It is reasonable for proceedings on a Monday to start later in the day to allow Members time to travel down from their constituencies. This time is needed so that an MP can spend Sunday as a family or constituency day. On a Monday, therefore, it makes sense for proceedings to continue as at present, starting at 2.30pm and finishing at 10pm.

9.3 To save the additional staff costs, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays MPs should have standard Chamber sitting hours of 9am – 6pm (these times would also apply to Thursdays but this is less of a change from current hours, as discussed below). With the exception of Mondays, this measure would have the effect of doing away with late night sittings.

9.4 At present the late starting time for sittings of the Chamber allows MPs to hold meetings without having to miss Parliamentary business. If this reform to Chamber hours were made alongside reform of how MPs vote, with the ‘holding over’ of the majority of votes (see Section 2, page 6), this would give MPs the opportunity to organise better and plan meetings so that they don’t clash with voting times. Given that the morning is a key part of the working day, this proposal would also give greater priority to business in the Chamber rather than outside of it. MPs would still be free to organise meetings during the evenings when the Chamber was not sitting.

9.5 The key aim of this proposal is to change the hours so that the main part of an MP’s typical working week is one that is more accessible to people currently under-represented in the House of Commons. For example, starting earlier and finishing at 6pm would mean that those with young children might be able to put them to bed without missing Parliamentary debates or votes.

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<sup>22</sup> An urgent question, formerly a Private Notice Question (PNQ) in the House of Commons, is a question of an urgent nature, for which no previous notice has been given, relating to a matter of public importance or the arrangement of business. For more see: <http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/questions-urgent-questions/>.

9.6 On Thursday, the House of Commons already does rise at 6.30pm, so we already have an example of how a more standard day works perfectly well. The hours for Thursday should be 9am-6pm as for Tuesday and Wednesday. This represents only a minor change from the current practice of sitting from 10.30am to 6.30pm.

9.7 This, combined with the time and money saved by using electronic voting, would give Members more time to scrutinise legislation at lower cost to the taxpayer. Consideration could also be given to moving Private Members' Bills<sup>23</sup> (PMBs) back to a midweek slot so that they are better attended, making Fridays a formal constituency day. If three hours rather than five were allotted for debate on Private Members' Bills, and this were combined with the proposal for the Chamber to sit earlier on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, there would be adequate time for PMBs earlier in the week without displacing other legislation.

9.8 The benefits of moving PMBs to a midweek slot, principally higher attendance from Members, would outweigh the cost of the shorter time allocated for debate.

## Conclusion

Parliament has to become more effective to serve the nation better. It cannot continue to waste taxpayers' money and MPs' time on antique processes that are not fit for purpose. This report is not exhaustive but is drawn not only from my experiences in the last 6 months as a new MP, but also from the extensive work that has already been done on the need for reform by others.

Many MPs would value clearer information on the legislation they are deciding on. This information would also make it easier for constituents to hold their MPs to account, while the introduction of an e-voting system would give constituents better value for money for the salaries paid to their MPs.

Following the expenses scandal, it is clear that if we are to rebuild the credibility and legitimacy of the House of Commons, further action on modernising the Commons is essential.

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<sup>23</sup> Private Members' Bills are Bills introduced by MPs and Lords who aren't government ministers, for more see: <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/Bills/private-members/>.



Country	Electronic voting		Number Year of votes	Notes
	Yes	No		
<b>European Parliament</b>	Yes		792 2009/10	Desk-based, card ID
<b>EU Member Parliaments</b>				
Austria	No			Votes by standing (approve) and sitting (disapprove)
Belgium House of Representatives	Yes		514 2003/4	Desk-based, no ID check
Belgium Senate	Yes		465 2003	Desk-based, no ID check; unanimous votes and those carried out by sitting and standing are not included in the figures
Czech Rep Deputies	Yes			Desk-based, card ID; votes also by show of hands
Czech Rep Senate	Yes			Desk-based, card ID
Denmark	Yes		697 2002/3	Desk-based touch screen voting, card ID (from Summer 2010)
Finland	Yes		433 2002	Desk-based, visual ID only - 3 to 5 minutes per vote
France Assemblée	Yes		312 2002/3	Desk-based
Germany Bundestag	No		7,200 2003	Votes mainly by show of hands; some (45 in 2003) via named voting cards
Germany Bundesrat	No			
Greece	Yes*		127 2002/3	* An electronic system was installed but not yet implemented (in May 2010); ID card
Ireland Dail	Yes		206 2009	Votes are generally Desk based by voting buttons - however, voting through lobbies can be called for (eg votes of confidence)
Ireland Senate	Yes		239 2009	As Dail
Italy Deputies	Yes		5,885 2003	Desk-based, card ID validated by fingerprint recognition; in addition to the electronic votes there were 5 roll call votes in 2003; and the
Luxembourg	Yes			Desk-based, touchscreen, ID by fingerprint recognition
Norway	Yes			Desk-based touchscreen or voting buttons
Poland Sejm	Yes			Desk-based, card ID
Poland Senate	Yes			Desk-based, card ID
Portugal	Yes		71 2009/10	Touch screen, card/PIN & use name and password (login possible at any desk)
Romania	Yes			Card ID
Slovakia	Yes			Card ID Chip & PIN
Sweden	Yes		697 2002/3	
Turkey	Yes			Touch screen fingerprint and password recognition; secret ballot voting performed outside electronic system
United Kingdom House of Commons	No		135 2009/10	Voting through lobbies & (a few "deferred") by ballot paper
			248 2008/9	"
United Kingdom House of Lords	No		43 2009/10	Voting through lobbies
			89 2008/9	"
<b>Other</b>				
Israel	Yes			Desk-based, touch screen
USA Congress	Yes		991 2009	Card ID, "voting stations"; some votes use non-electronic system
USA Senate	No		397 2009	Oral roll-call votes only
Canada House of Commons	No		158 2009	As Westminster, but no lobbies - voting takes place by MPs rising in their seats
Australia House of Reps & Senate	No		129 2009	As Westminster, but no lobbies - Members locate themselves on either side of the Chamber (Members have to vote if present)
<b>UK Devolved Legislatures</b>				
Scotland	Yes		249 2009/10	Desk-based, Card ID
Wales	Yes			Desk-based, Card ID
N Ireland	No		45 2009/10	Voting lobbies

Source: ECPRD; National Parliament websites  
Washington Post Votes database  
[http://www.vote-watch.eu/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/votewatch\\_report\\_30\\_june\\_2010.pdf](http://www.vote-watch.eu/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/votewatch_report_30_june_2010.pdf)  
NIA Official Report  
<http://www.parlamento.pt/ActividadeParlamentar/Paginas/ActividadesParlamentares.aspx>  
House of Commons Sessional Digest  
House of Lords Sessional Statistics <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldsession/statistics.html>  
<http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/commission/reports/2009.pdf>