

House of Commons

Liaison Committee

**EVIDENCE FROM THE  
PRIME MINISTER**

First Special Report of Session 2001–02

## **Reports from the Liaison Committee since 1 May 1997**

### **1997 Parliament**

#### **Session 1996-97**

First The Work of Select Committees, HC 323

#### **Session 1999-2000**

First Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive, HC 300

Second Independence or Control?, HC 748

Third Resource Accounting and Budgeting, HC 841

#### **Session 2000-01**

First Shifting the Balance: Unfinished Business, HC 321

### **2001 Parliament**

#### **Session 2001-02**

First The Work of Select Committees in 2001, HC 590

Second Select Committees: Modernisation Proposals, HC 692

House of Commons

Liaison Committee

**EVIDENCE FROM THE  
PRIME MINISTER**

First Special Report of Session 2001–02

*Report, together with  
Proceedings of the Committee,  
Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*

---

*Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 20 June 2002*

---

HC 984

Published on 3 July 2002 by authority of the House of Commons

London : The Stationery Office Limited

£3.50

## LIAISON COMMITTEE

The Liaison Committee is appointed to consider general matters relating to the work of select committees; to advise the House of Commons Commission on select committees; and to choose select committee reports for debate in the House.

### Current Membership

Mr Alan Williams MP (*Labour, Swansea West*) (Chairman)

The Chairmen for the time being of the Select Committees listed below:

Accommodation and Works - Mr Derek Conway MP (*Conservative, Old Bexley and Sidcup*)  
 Administration - Mrs Marion Roe MP (*Conservative, Broxbourne*)  
 Broadcasting - Mr David Lepper MP (*Labour/Co-op, Brighton Pavilion*)  
 Catering - Mr Dennis Turner MP (*Labour/Co-op, Wolverhampton South East*)  
 Culture, Media and Sport - Mr Gerald Kaufman MP (*Labour, Manchester Gorton*)  
 Defence - Mr Bruce George MP (*Labour, Walsall South*)  
 Deregulation and Regulatory Reform - Mr Peter Pike MP (*Labour, Burnley*)  
 Education and Skills - Mr Barry Sheerman MP (*Labour/Co-op, Huddersfield*)  
 Environmental Audit - Mr John Horam MP (*Conservative, Orpington*)  
 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - Mr David Curry MP (*Conservative, Skipton and Ripon*)  
 European Scrutiny - Mr Jimmy Hood MP (*Labour, Clydesdale*)  
 Finance and Services - Mr Stuart Bell MP (*Labour, Middlesbrough*)  
 Foreign Affairs - Mr Donald Anderson MP (*Labour, Swansea East*)  
 Health - Mr David Hinchliffe MP (*Labour, Wakefield*)  
 Home Affairs - Mr Chris Mullin MP (*Labour, Sunderland South*)  
 Joint Committee on Human Rights - Jean Corston MP (*Labour, Bristol East*)  
 Information - Mr Michael Fabricant MP (*Conservative, Lichfield*)  
 International Development - Mr Tony Baldry MP (*Conservative, Banbury*)  
 Northern Ireland Affairs - Mr Michael Mates MP (*Conservative, East Hampshire*)  
 Procedure - Sir Nicholas Winterton MP (*Conservative, Macclesfield*)  
 Public Accounts - Mr Edward Leigh MP (*Conservative, Gainsborough*)  
 Public Administration - Dr Tony Wright (*Labour, Cannock Chase*)  
 Science and Technology - Dr Ian Gibson MP (*Labour, Norwich North*)  
 Scottish Affairs - Irene Adams MP (*Labour, Paisley North*)  
 Selection - Mr John McWilliam MP (*Labour, Blaydon*)  
 Standards and Privileges - Sir George Young, MP (*Conservative, North West Hampshire*)  
 Statutory Instruments - Mr David Tredinnick MP (*Labour, Bosworth*)  
 Trade and Industry - Mr Martin O'Neill MP (*Labour, Ochil*)  
 Transport, Local Government and the Regions - Mr Andrew Bennett MP (*Labour, Denton and Reddish*) or Hon Gwyneth Dunwoody MP (*Labour, Crewe and Nantwich*)  
 Treasury - Mr John McFall MP (*Labour/Co-op, Dumbarton*)  
 Welsh Affairs - Mr Martyn Jones MP (*Labour, Clwyd South*)  
 Work and Pensions - Mr Archy Kirkwood MP (*Liberal Democrat, Roxburgh and Berwickshire*)

and Mr Richard Allan MP (*Liberal Democrat, Sheffield Hallam*)

### Powers

The powers of the Committee are set out in House of Commons Standing Order No. 145. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

**Publications**

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at [www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/liahome.htm](http://www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/liahome.htm). A list of Reports of the Committee since 1997 is on the inside front cover.

**Contacts**

All correspondence should be addressed to The Clerk of the Liaison Committee, Committee Office, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general inquiries is: 020 7219 6432; the Committee's e-mail address is: [liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk](mailto:liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk).

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
REPORT	
Evidence from the Prime Minister .....	5
Introduction .....	5
Timing .....	5
Location .....	5
Organisation of Questions and Themes .....	6
Official Record of the Meeting .....	6
Conclusion .....	6
PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE RELATING TO THE REPORT .....	7

# FIRST SPECIAL REPORT

**The Liaison Committee has agreed to the following Special Report:**

## **Evidence from the Prime Minister**

### **Introduction**

1. In late April, our Chairman received an approach from the Prime Minister offering to appear twice a year before the Liaison Committee “to discuss domestic and international affairs”.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the last Parliament, our predecessor Committee had sought to arrange an annual session with the Prime Minister to discuss the Government’s Annual Report, but this had been turned down by Mr Blair on the basis that he would be trespassing on the territory of individual ministers.<sup>2</sup> The Government no longer publishes an annual report.

2. The Committee was glad to agree to the Prime Minister’s proposal for twice-yearly sessions.<sup>3</sup> Select committees have become the most effective parliamentary vehicle for holding the government to account. The appearance of the Prime Minister in public before a committee containing all the Chairs of select committees complements the investigative work of individual committees, notably those monitoring the work of government departments. It will at last bring the Prime Minister himself within select committee scrutiny. He needs to be accountable in detail both as Head of the Government, and in respect of the staff and advisers who answer directly to him and for whom no-one else can answer.

3. The format of the occasion offers a further advantage, as the Prime Minister implied in his Written Answer. Exchanges in the calmer setting of a committee room should prove more productive and informative. The current operation of Prime Minister’s Questions in the Chamber, with its confrontational exchanges and theatrical style, provides an unsuitable setting for questioning in depth.

4. We set out below the arrangements that have been made, in consultation with the Prime Minister, for the initial sessions of oral evidence. To some extent they remain experimental, and may need to be adjusted in the light of experience.

### **Timing**

5. The first session of oral evidence will take place on **Tuesday 16th July at 10.30 am**. Subsequent sessions will take place in January and July at a similar time. Each session is expected to last for between two and two and a half hours.

### **Location**

6. The meeting will be held in the **Boothroyd Room in Portcullis House**. This committee room contains some hundred seats for the press and public, and is equipped with television cameras for broadcasting, enabling the media to make use of the signal for live and recorded broadcasts. The session will also be available on Parliament’s internal television network and be webcast via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk). This should ensure

---

<sup>1</sup> HC Deb, 26 April 2002, col 538w

<sup>2</sup> Liaison Committee, First Report of Session 2000-0 *Shifting the Balance Unfinished Business*, HC 321, paras 143 to 151. The Public Administration Committee had earlier been refused in its request to take evidence from the Prime Minister on the Ministerial Code. See Public Administration Committee, Third Report of Session 2000-0 1, *Improving the Rule Book*, HC 235, Appendix 4.

<sup>3</sup> As a result, the terms of reference of the Committee were amended to include the hearing of evidence from the Prime Minister on matters of public policy. See Votes and Proceedings, 14 May 2002, p 869.

that the Prime Minister's evidence is immediately accessible to those who are not able to be present in the committee room.

### **Organisation of Questions and Themes**

7. We have already noted that this occasion provides a framework for questioning different from the rapid and often superficial exchanges at Prime Minister's Questions in the Chamber. For the new opportunity to be properly used, permitting more substantial exchanges of greater depth to take place, the questioning will be based on a limited number of themes selected in advance.

8. Each session will cover both domestic and international affairs. While committees may suggest possible subjects to their Chairs, it will be for the latter as members of the Liaison Committee to agree the final agenda for the session. Questioning on each topic will be led by a different member of the Committee.

### **Official Record of the Meeting**

9. An uncorrected transcript of the Prime Minister's session transcribed by the House's official Shorthand Writer will be placed on the Internet and in the Library of the House as soon as possible. The corrected transcript will be published in due course.

### **Conclusion**

10. In responding positively to the Liaison Committee's invitation, the Prime Minister has provided a welcome extra opportunity for parliamentary accountability of the Government's policy and actions. It marks further progress in strengthening the scrutiny role of select committees, taking advantage of the committee format which has long proved effective for the individual committees which we chair.

## PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE RELATING TO THE REPORT

THURSDAY 20 JUNE 2002

Members present:

Mr Alan Williams (in the Chair)

Mr Richard Allan	Mr David Lepper
Mr Donald Anderson	Mr John McFall
Mr Andrew Bennett	Mr Chris Mullin
Mr Michael Fabricant	Mr Peter Pike
Dr Ian Gibson	Mr Barry Sheerman
Mr David Hinchliffe	Mr David Tredinnick
Mr John Horam	Sir Nicholas Winterton
Mr Martyn Jones	Sir George Young

The Committee deliberated.

\* \* \* \* \*

Draft Special Report (Evidence from the Prime Minister), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraph 1 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 2 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 3 to 9 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 10 read, amended, and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the First Special Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

\* \* \* \* \*

[Adjourned till Thursday 11 July at half-past Nine o'clock.]

ISBN 0-215-00395-0



9 780215 003959



Distributed by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

**The Stationery Office**

(mail, telephone and fax orders only)

PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN

General enquiries 0870 600 5522

Order through the Parliamentary Hotline *Lo-call* 0845 7 023474

Fax orders 0870 600 5533

You can now order books online at [www.tso.co.uk](http://www.tso.co.uk)

**The Stationery Office Bookshops**

123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ

020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394

68–69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD

0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699

9–21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS

0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634

16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD

028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401

The Stationery Office Oriel Bookshop

18–19 High Street, Cardiff CF1 2BZ

029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

71 Lothian Road, Edinburgh EH3 9AZ

0870 606 5566 Fax 0870 606 5588

**The Parliamentary Bookshop**

12 Bridge Street, Parliament Square

London SW1A 2JX

Telephone orders 020 7219 3890

General enquiries 020 7219 3890

Fax orders 020 7219 3866

The Stationery Office's Accredited Agents

(see Yellow Pages)

*and through good booksellers*

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2002

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Copyright Unit,

Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2–16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ

– Fax 01603 723000

ISBN 0 215 00395 0