



# THE REMOTELY REPRESENTATIVE HOUSE?

LESSON LEARNING FROM THE HYBRID COMMONS

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The Centenary Action Group is a cross-party coalition of over 100 activists, politicians and organisations campaigning to remove the intersectional barriers to women's political participation and improve the representation of women at every level of of decision-making.

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## 1. FOREWORD

'Family friendly' and 'inclusive' aren't words often associated with the Houses of Parliament or UK democracy. But the Covid-19 pandemic and the move to virtual proceedings have proved to be a giant leap forward for our elected representatives.

Whether it's a blood-red study, attention seeking pets or curious toddlers, it's unexpectedly achieved a welcome change in public perceptions. Our MPs are now seen as less remote and removed, facing the same challenges as families everywhere.

However, in 2021, just 34% of MPs are women, 10% are Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic and less than 1% are disabled. Arcane and anti-social parliamentary working practices, as well as the glacially slow recognition of the need for parental leave, remain major barriers to women's involvement in political life.

The long hours spent sitting in the Chamber without comfort breaks and the inaccessibility of many of Westminster's famous corridors have made national politics a particularly difficult place for people with disabilities and underlying health conditions. For those with constituencies far from London, the thousands of miles each week creates further hurdles to jump which compounds regional inequalities.

When given the option of some flexibility we have seen how much it is appreciated, particularly by women.

During the height of the first wave of the pandemic, the House of Commons Library found that female MPs were much more likely than male MPs to use virtual participation during 'hybrid proceedings'. In addition, more than half of women MPs took advantage of proxy-voting, due to Covid-19 medical reasons and caring responsibilities, which we know are overwhelmingly shouldered by women.

Allowing more flexibility in the way Parliament operates long-term would open the doors to a more diverse range of people who want to take an active part in our political life. This is needed, not just because it is the fairest way to proceed, but because the quality of policies developed will be so much better when a wider range of views are considered.

We are not advocating that virtual proceedings should take the place of in-person parliamentary business. But we do believe that it should be permanently available as an option for those that need it.

Parliament has been given a once in a generation opportunity to bring the House into the 21st century. We are calling on our parliamentary authorities to think of the long-term gains for UK democracy and seize the moment.



**Helen Pankhurst CBE,**  
Centenary Action Group Convenor

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2020, like Parliaments across the globe, the UK House of Commons was forced to adapt in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. Like many workplaces, it turned to technology. At an impressive speed, the House was able to put in place new ways of working. In what became known as the 'Hybrid Parliament' changes were made to allow for MPs to 'virtually' participate. The Commons was widely acknowledged to have established world-leading procedures.

The Hybrid Parliament allowed MPs who couldn't be physically present - due to caring responsibilities, travel restrictions, shielding themselves or a family member - to carry on representing their constituents from home in many, but not all, Parliamentary activities. These included, asking oral questions of Ministers and the Prime Minister, participating in Select Committee meetings and report writing, and most radically, albeit for a very short period of time, voting remotely on legislation. We even saw the Prime Minister attend PMQs virtually whilst isolating at home.

With vaccinations offering hope in 2021, *The Remotely Representative House*, asks the timely question: What lessons can be learnt from these new ways of parliamentary working? Amidst concerns about a 'narrowing or even closing' of this window of opportunity for progressive reform ([Challender and Deane 2021](#)) *The Remotely Representative House* makes the case for the continuation of the Hybrid House of Commons. If the House fails to take this opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to greater diversity through the adoption of modern working practices, it would fall far short of the international standard of best parliamentary practice.

### AN EXCLUSIONARY HOUSE

Perhaps one of the most poignant moments of the pandemic Parliament, was Tracey Crouch MP's impassioned pleading to the Leader of the House, the Rt Hon Jacob-Rees Mogg, in November 2020. Crouch was excluded from participating in a debate *on* breast cancer whilst shielding at home *with* breast cancer. As she put it: MPs with "real and current life experience" of the disease were "disappointingly unable to participate".<sup>1</sup> More ironic still, on occasion during the pandemic the House took decisions about how it should undertake its work - and therefore who would be effectively excluded from representing their constituents at Westminster - in ways that meant those MPs physically unable to attend the parliamentary estate could not have their voices heard or votes counted. These MPs are precisely those who share experiences of shielding, caring and homeschooling, with those severely impacted by the pandemic. The inclusion of such perspectives is essential to shaping the UK's Covid-19 response and recovery, both in the immediate and longer term.

The marginalization and effective exclusion of some MPs is not unique to the pandemic; though it is magnified by it. Old ways of working at Westminster have in recent years been starkly revealed as inadequate, highlighting long-standing barriers to equal participation for both sitting MPs and possible future ones. Consider the contrasting images of Tulip Siddiq MP in the pre-pandemic Parliament voting in a wheelchair after delaying the birth of her child, to Jonathan Gullis MP calmly cradling his new-born baby whilst participating virtually in a Select Committee meeting during the Hybrid Parliament.

The image of an MP on the verge of giving birth having to attend Parliament to register her vote was hugely powerful, belatedly triggering the House of Commons to make provision for the new mother and father MP via baby leave proxy voting. The contrast between Siddiq and Gullis neatly encapsulates the opportunities that a future Hybrid Parliament offers to diversify who sits in our elected institutions and to transform perceptions - and indeed the reality - of how MPs' work can be done and by whom.

It leads us to ask what is needed to permit the full participation of MPs who may not may not always be able to physically present on the parliamentary estate but would nonetheless be able to participate from home. This would include, for example, MPs who have long term health conditions, caring commitments, are suffering

from bereavement, as well as those who may be ill for shorter periods of time. Historically the House has acted in ways that hide the reality that MPs are just like other people; the difference is, that unlike modern workplaces, the Commons too often fails to acknowledge this.

## LESSON LEARNING FROM NECESSITY

As we approach the anniversary of the first Covid-19 changes to the House of Commons, the case for the continuation of the Hybrid Parliament remains compelling. Its virtues - like so many that have been seen in other workplaces during the pandemic - hold beyond this time of crisis; what began as necessary in 2020 is in fact preferable for the future.

The Hybrid Parliament has shown it is possible to accommodate MPs' need for more modern ways of working. Not only does this have benefits for currently sitting MPs - such as Jamie Stone MP who has spoken about caring for his wife during the pandemic<sup>2</sup> - but it has the potential to open up the Commons to a more diverse slate of candidates in future elections. The images of MPs representing their constituents remotely, sitting in front of their microwaves at home for example, normalises and demystifies the job of an MP. Combined with the knowledge that when needed, they would be able to participate remotely, a transformation in who considers themselves able to fulfil the job of an MP could take place.

## THE HOUSE'S RESPONSIBILITY

The democratic gains of truly representative political institutions are well known. Parliaments which favour equal participation and better reflect the societies they represent are more likely to produce better policy outcomes for all citizens; and a diversity sensitive Parliament is a more democratically legitimate one (IPU). Good parliaments do not just happen, however. Political and institutional leaders need to act to bring them about. The Procedure Committee has made it clear that there should be considered reflection on Parliament's pandemic measures. Questions of representation and inclusion should be central to any formal review by the House. Constitutionally speaking it is for MPs to decide on how the House runs, but many of our recommendations will need the support of the Leader of the House.

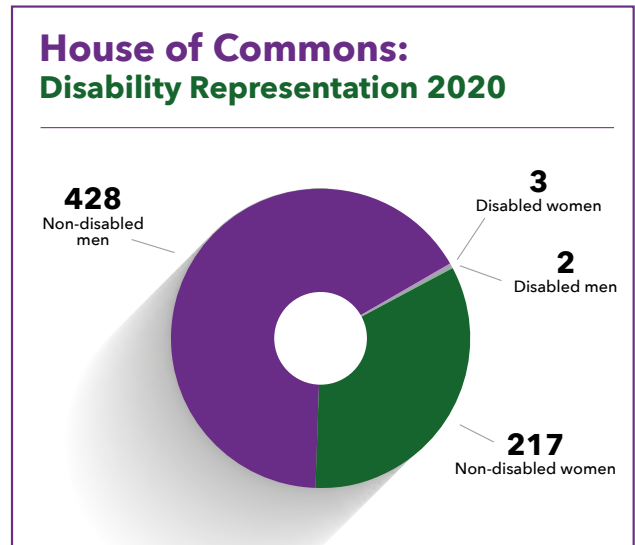
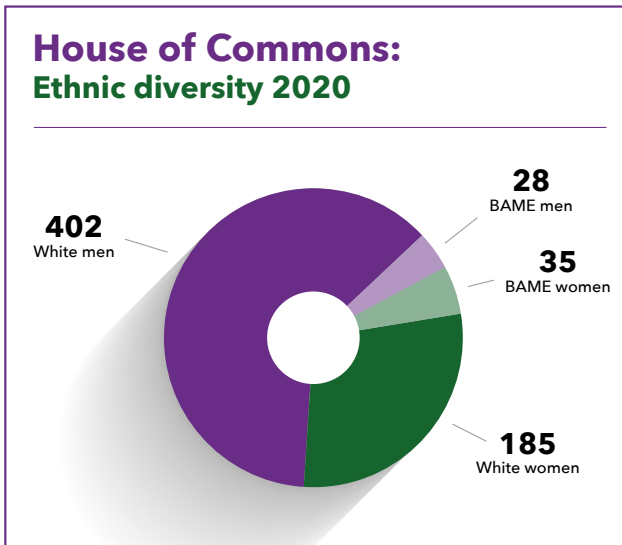
*The Remotely Representative House* makes 21 recommendations. Building on the style of *The Good Parliament* Report each recommendation is made the responsibility of particular individuals or groups within the House, detailing the necessary steps to be taken. Together our recommendations would see an effective virtual Commons that compliments rather than detracts from the physical one.

*The Remotely Representative House* starts from the premise that:

**Where there is no meaningful detriment to the overall effectiveness of the House of Commons, Members should be free and entitled to decide how they participate, whether in person or remotely.**

This is a bold and not uncontentious claim, yet it is also rather modest. In a future House of Commons, virtual participation *should* be just another way of doing the job of being an MP. There might be those MPs who always participate in person, and those whose preference, or need, is for virtual participation much, if not all, of the time. As is now, the electorate will decide whether they are well-represented by their particular MP's way of working.

*The Remotely Representative House* recognizes the many virtues of physical parliaments but argues that hybridity has benefitted both individual members and the House of Commons as an institution. These benefits relate to the core work of parliaments - representation, scrutiny, and accountability - and in respect of realizing a parliament properly representative of those it stands and acts for. Were this Report's recommendations adopted, it would establish a more inclusive and effective House of Commons than its predecessors. One that looks like those it represents, is hospitable to all, including those with caring responsibilities, illness or those who identify as having a disability, and is responsive to the needs and interests of the British public. It is on all these grounds that the House of Commons should continue on a hybrid basis, post-pandemic; this should be the norm for a 21st Century Parliament. It would make the House of Commons a world leading, modern institution.



Data obtained from [House of Commons Library 2020](#) and [Disability News Service 2019](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### LEADER OF THE HOUSE

1. The Leader of the House should move a Motion giving effect to any recommendation of the Procedure or Liaison Committees on hybridity, giving the House time for debate and allowing for a free vote.

### THE SPEAKER

2. Continue publishing 'call lists' and advanced notice and timing of Urgent Questions and Statements.
3. Commission research into how comparable parliaments enable 'spontaneity' in virtual and/or hybrid debate proceedings; identify and publish international 'best practice'.
4. Continue with a comprehensive scheme of virtual participation in Chamber debates, based on international 'best practice' (allowing for intervention, for example).
5. Systematically and comprehensively monitor and report the speeches and interventions in debates, questions, private members' bills and other parliamentary activities by MPs' sex/gender and other major social characteristics - and, where hybridity continues by *physical and remote* participation.<sup>3</sup>
6. Establish a new Reference Group to lead on the Diversity Sensitive Parliaments agenda.
7. When the UK Parliament (Commons and Lords) next undertakes its Inter-Parliamentary Union Gender Sensitive Parliaments Audit, include *The Remotely Representative House's* recommendations.

### HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

8. Restate the House's collective responsibility for enhancing representation and inclusion by endorsing the new Reference Group and formally acknowledging *The Remotely Representative House*.
9. Endorse an 'online first' principle for 'everyday' practices.

### PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

10. Following the permanent change to Standing Orders relating to Baby leave, recommend the extension of proxy voting to other categories of Member: inter alia, those suffering from serious illness, those with caring responsibilities, and those who are bereaved.
11. As part of its post-pandemic review of proxy voting, reconsider the introduction of remote voting for all qualifying Members (including those who may become entitled to a proxy in the future).
12. As part of its post-Covid 'general review of House practices', determine the viability of hybrid General Committees.<sup>4</sup>
13. Invite the participation of the Women and Equalities Committee as the Procedure Committee reviews the extension of proxy voting and undertakes its general review of parliamentary practices post-Covid.
14. Until all Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, press the Leader of the House to act on their recommendation to reintroduce remote voting for all members, combining both on-estate and off-estate remote voting.



**LIAISON COMMITTEE**

15. Recommend that individual members of Select Committees may participate remotely and press the Leader of the House to so act.
16. Recommend that Select Committees (under its purview) may meet fully virtually, by agreement of the Committee.
17. Select Committees should be supported in the continuation of the more extensive remote participation of witnesses practised during Covid-19.
18. Research should be undertaken either (a) in-house or (b) through the commissioning of independent research, to assess the relative effectiveness of virtual, hybrid and in-person Select Committees, including the effect on witness diversity, Committee cohesion, committee efficiency, and scrutiny and impact.

**WOMEN AND EQUALITIES COMMITTEE**

19. Work with the Procedure Committee in its two Covid-related reviews (Recommendation 13).

**WIP APPG, WOMEN'S PLP; CONSERVATIVE WOMEN'S CAUCUS, AND ALL WOMEN MPs**

20. Establish a formal Parliamentary Women's Caucus to lead on the gender sensitive House of Commons agenda and support a new Reference Group and the diversity sensitive parliaments agenda.

**RESTORATION AND RENEWAL (R&R) BODY**

21. During R&R, provide remote voting for all Members and centre hybrid and remote participation in all planning for a restored House of Commons.

## 3. THE REMOTELY REPRESENTATIVE HOUSE: INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 has affected parliaments across the globe. Pandemic measures – public health regulations, social distancing, and lockdowns – have restricted or ruled out established working practices. Limits on the numbers of Members permitted on a parliamentary estate or parts of legislative buildings forced many of these changes. Some parliaments temporarily closed, others became fully remote and/or hybrid institutions.<sup>5</sup> At the individual level, some elected Members and parliamentary staff's personal situations meant that they were – and still are – prevented from being physically present on the UK Parliament Estate.

At impressive speed, the UK House of Commons responded to the crisis by creating a Hybrid Parliament. It gained international plaudits: considered for a time 'world beating' and 'best practice'. In the words of The Chair of the Procedure Committee, Karen Bradley ([Hansard 19/11/2020](#)) "the rest of the world looked on in awe". Leading international parliament scholars ([Russell et al 2020](#)) praised parliamentary staff for "[working] tirelessly to devise innovative technological solutions", calling Westminster's approach "world leading" ([Procedure Committee Oral Evidence 08/07/20](#)).

As parliaments responded rapidly to Covid-19, long-standing concerns regarding the representative nature of elected political institutions – the question of who sits in our parliaments – and the quality of representative democracy – how well our interests are met by our elected representatives – were once again raised as central to the political conversation. Just as new ways of remote working revealed opportunities for increasing access to Parliaments for different, under-represented groups – women, carers, those who identify as having a disability, or those with illnesses, for example – old ways of working were shown to be inadequate as some Members were excluded from participating because of their caring responsibilities, health concerns and/or for reasons of geographic distance and travel restrictions.

Whilst parliaments differ in respect of associated electoral systems, organisation and day-to-day functions, there are internationally agreed standards for a 'Good Parliament'. The Inter-Parliamentary Union defines this as one that is 'truly representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective in its many functions'.<sup>6</sup> As a member of the IPU the UK has already 'signed up' to this standard. The Commons has shown itself willing and able to respond to its diversity insensitivities in recent years, and especially since 2016. Proxy voting for Members on baby leave was made permanent in September 2020 and is arguably only the highest profile of a series of reforms that have improved the experience of Members from under-represented groups.

**"We need to make sure that we do not exclude anybody from standing for election to this place because of their gender, disability, race, religion or sexuality. As an organisation, we have not yet grasped the bigger role that we have to play in picking up the picture that was so eloquently painted by Professor Sarah Childs in her report, which has also been discussed in *"The Good Parliament"* guide and at the Speaker's Conference in 2010."**

**Maria Miller MP, Former Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, Conservative.**

*The Remotely Representative House's* recommendations build on previous research on how best to reform the Commons to make it more inclusive, i.e. a gender and diversity sensitive parliament (GSP and DSP, respectively): The Speaker's Conference 2010; the Women in Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group's (APPG) *Improving Parliament*, 2014; *The Good Parliament Report*, 2016; The UK/IPU *Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit*, 2018; The Women and Equalities Committee GSP Report/Inquiry, 2019. There are also excellent reports - both in-House and external - documenting and analysing how the UK House of Commons has changed its practices and procedures, and to what effect.<sup>7</sup>

Informed by this literature, and in many ways working with Parliament's traditions and culture, *The Remotely Representative House* asks how the Commons can learn from its 2020 experiences and further its recent GSP and DSP achievements since 2016 - most notably in the introduction of a permanent system of baby leave proxy voting for MPs, the making permanent of the Women and Equalities Committee and changes to the Parliamentary dress code. With the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines, 2021 offers the possibility of a return (of sorts) to previous ways of working. It is a critical moment to ask whether the UK Parliament *should* return to its previous operating mode. *The Remotely Representative House* suggests otherwise, seeing 2021 as an opportunity to further the Commons' progress.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The report uses a range of research data. Analysis of parliamentary debates and reports; a small survey of 57 MPs (see Appendix 1), conducted during the Hybrid Parliament; and technical interviews with parliamentary staff associated with the implementation of new and revised working practices, including technological innovations. The report presents the results of this research and considers its implication for reform possibilities. In some areas, current data is lacking or limited, and hence several recommendations seek the gathering of further evidence, to allow the House to make more informed decisions in the future. In other areas, the experience of the Hybrid Parliament allows for stronger conclusions and recommendations. Throughout, it keeps in mind the acknowledged tension between a government seeking to successfully deliver on their legislative agenda and the legislature holding the executive properly to account. Any claims about reforms' advantages or disadvantages for the House's effectiveness should be evidence rather than preference based.

## 4. REPORT FINDINGS AND RATIONALE

*The Remotely Representative House* aims for a House of Commons that meets the international standard of a 'Good Parliament' which by definition means a gender and diversity sensitive one. Despite significant improvements over the last 30 years, the House of Commons remains unrepresentative of its citizens. Women constitute just one-third of all MPs; Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic representation stands at 10%, 5 percentage points fewer than the percentage in the population;<sup>8</sup> only an estimated 5 MPs identify as having a disability<sup>9</sup> compared to 21% of the UK population,<sup>10</sup> and MPs disproportionately attended fee-paying schools and elite universities.<sup>11</sup>

Changing the *composition* of an elected institution - making it inclusive and diverse - is only the first step. Guided by a series of GSP and DSP principles (Box 1), *The Remotely Representative House* sees the House of Commons as an institution that should facilitate *the effective participation of all* of its Members, and be open to the greater participation of more MPs from currently under-represented groups. The remote ways of working adopted in the Covid-19 period has shown, beyond any doubt, the potential for a hybrid House of Commons to help achieve this ambition. Specifically, and where there is no meaningful detriment to the overall effectiveness of the House, *Members should be free and entitled to decide how they participate in all of the Common's proceedings.*

### BOX 1: Guiding Principles

#### The Remotely Representative House

- Where there is no meaningful detriment to the overall effectiveness of the House of Commons, Members should be free and entitled to decide how they participate, whether in person or remotely.

#### Representation and Inclusion

- An elected political institution should be representative of all the people it stands and acts for.
- The recruitment and retention of diverse Members is negatively affected by some of the House's institutional rules, practices and procedures, and norms and culture.
- When a member is unable to be physically present, for good reason, constituents should not be denied representation.

#### Effective Participation

- A key dimension of a diversity sensitive parliament is one where all members participate fully and effectively across the House.
- Parity of participation amongst MPs must be guaranteed even when a Member is unable to be physically present for good reason.

#### Institutional Responsibility

- The House of Commons should be a national, and international, role model.
- It is for the House as an institution to facilitate Members' full and effective participation, even when a Member is unable to be physically present for good reason.
- Such provisions should be a right and not provided on a case-by-case or exceptional basis.

## PARLIAMENT AS A PLACE OF DEMOCRACY AND WORK

**“What I am bothered about is having a modern workplace that I can operate in as somebody who has a hidden disability... it needs to be a workplace that is inclusive for everybody, and there are conventions in the Chamber that make it not inclusive for everybody... Where they exist, I think they should be got rid of.”**

**Daisy Cooper MP, Deputy Leader, Liberal Democrats**

Parliament is both a place of democracy and a place of work. Parliament should accordingly be a role model institution. As Mark Harper MP noted ([Hansard 8/06/2020](#)), “Our job as parliamentarians is to do the right thing and set an example for the country”. Yet, the House is frequently acknowledged to be in need of ‘catching up’ to an outside world that has moved on. Beyond Parliament the effective exclusion of some individuals from the workplace would usually be considered illegal.<sup>12</sup> Like other citizens, MPs should have the right to equal access and participation.

At present, MPs must ask Whips to be accommodated when sick or responsible for childcare – for instance, for voting they might receive a ‘pair’ or be ‘noddled through’ (see quote box below). These mechanisms are informal, opaque, and rarely understood by the public. Nor do all parties participate in pairing, and they are not always honoured – as with the (pre-pandemic) high profile 2018/19 cases of MPs Naz Shah, Jo Swinson and Tulip Siddiq – wheeled into the Chamber with a sick bowl, experiencing a ‘broken pair’ of votes and delaying her caesarean to vote in person, respectively. As already noted, parliamentary scenes witnessed under Covid-19 revealed yet again just how antiquated and unaccommodating some of the House’s rule and culture remains: another example is Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Committee, who decried that his exclusion made him ‘a parliamentary eunuch’ – his disability required him to shield.<sup>13</sup> Absent from the parliamentary estate, some MPs were limited in their ability to fulfil their parliamentary duties.

**Pairing is an arrangement between two MPs of opposing parties to not vote in a particular division. This enables an MP to be absent without affecting the result of the vote as they effectively cancel each other out. Pairing is an informal arrangement which is not recognised by the House of Commons but must be registered with the Whips. Pairing is not allowed in divisions of great political importance.<sup>14</sup>**

**Nodding through is when an MP is counted as having voted because, although they are present on the parliamentary estate, they are unable to pass through the division lobby because they are physically unwell or they have a small child with them.<sup>15</sup>**

Whips are widely regarded today as more accommodating of Members’ needs than in the past; a welcome development. But MPs must not be reliant on Whips’ goodwill, who we know may not always make allowances. Rather than accommodating MPs’ diversities by individuals asking to be treated as an exception, *The Remotely Representative House* encourages the House to start from a principle of inclusion. In this way Parliament would model best practice for elected institutions and better reflect the norms, rules and regulations of other workplaces.

“How long are we going to keep a system that was created centuries ago? ...I think there is a real opportunity now to embrace the modern technology in the modern age ...I put on record the importance of ensuring that we are at the forefront of equality and making sure that we are a Parliament that sets the world standard – if we are the mother of Parliaments – on how you engage people with underlying health conditions, disabilities and other equality issues ...I think we should really advance our Parliament, but also set new standards for us all to understand and adhere to.”

Rachael Maskell MP, Labour

## PARITY OF PARTICIPATION DURING THE PANDEMIC PARLIAMENT

“Those who cannot be here must be allowed to participate and have their voices heard and to represent their constituents. They were elected in exactly the same way as those of us who can be here physically, and they need to be heard.”

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Chair of the Procedure Committee, Conservative

Animated debate over the Commons’ hybrid proceedings has been seen. Members’ positions usually reflect their individual circumstances, party, background, group identity, geography and institutional positions. The preferences of backbenchers do not always align with their frontbenchers. A key area of contestation is the right of those MPs not physically present to participate in various parliamentary activities, most notably debates in the Chamber ([Russell et al 2020](#)).

Whilst there was regrettably a portrayal of MPs who stayed away from the Chamber as poor parliamentarians by traditional voices on the back and front benches ([Challender and Deane 2021](#)), the (limited) acceptance that there are legitimate health and social reasons to be physically absent from the House of Commons implies the same can be said for ‘normal times’ too. If the Commons was to return to solely physical proceedings, the effective exclusion of some members, at times unable to be physically present, would reinstate and reproduce inequalities amongst MPs (mostly hidden in the pre-pandemic era), with constituents’ right to representation unnecessarily restricted once again.

**BOX 2:** 21% of MPs in our survey have not attended Parliament physically since April 2020. 9 of these 11 MPs cited caring responsibilities or shielding themselves or a family member as a reason for nonattendance.

22% of MP respondents to a Procedure Committee survey said they were not attending Westminster in person at the moment.

### BOX 3: Survey Results: MPs' caring responsibilities

	Children younger than 21 at home when remote working	Children under 12 at home when remote working	Other caring responsibilities
All MPs	22	15	14
Men	11	8	7
Women	10	7	5

N=54 Gender/Sex data not available for all respondents

**BOX 4:** After the threat of coronavirus ends, and it is safe to work without social distancing measures, do you support the continuation of some, or all, of the Hybrid Parliament measures put in place?

	Yes	No
All	48	7
MPs with children under 21 or other caring responsibilities	27	3

## PARLIAMENTARY CAPACITY & TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

Arguments against virtual participation hereafter can no longer be based on criticisms of technology; 2020 proved the Commons' capacity to support institutional innovation. The hard and software has and does work. As already noted, the UK House of Commons showed itself to be 'world beating' in its technological response to the crisis, including remote voting.

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL CHOICE

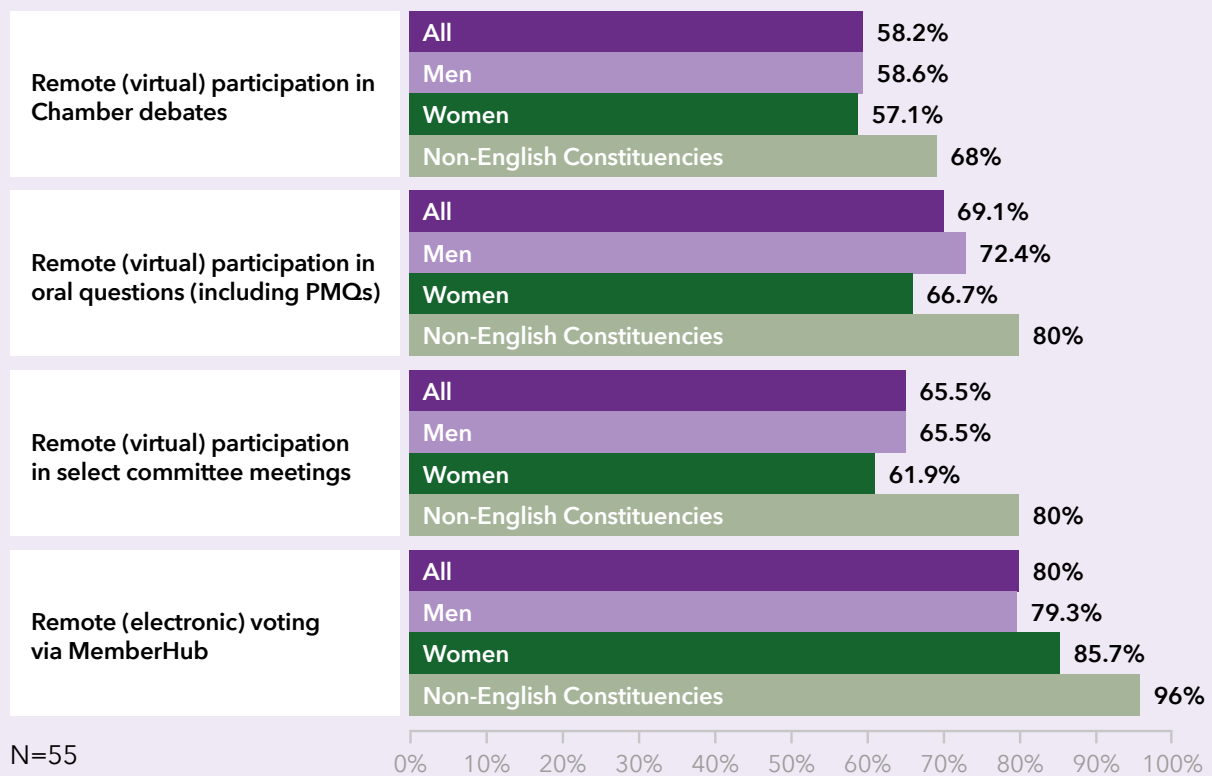
It is widely acknowledged at Westminster that MPs are – and should be – free to choose how they do their job, a principle MPs hold dear. With no formal job description, there are multiple ways to be an MP; some focus on Chamber debates and oratory; some are prolific signers of EDMs and 'seek out' PMBs; others raise constituency issues in Westminster Hall; and yet others are driven by scrutiny and their Committee work. MPs also vary significantly in how they choose to balance their Westminster and constituency duties.

In a future parliament, virtual participation should be just another way of doing the job of an MP. There might be those who always participate in person, and those whose preference, or need, is for the virtual much, if not all, of the time. As is now, the electorate will decide whether they are well-represented by their MP's way of working.

### TIME FOR THE HOUSE TO DECIDE

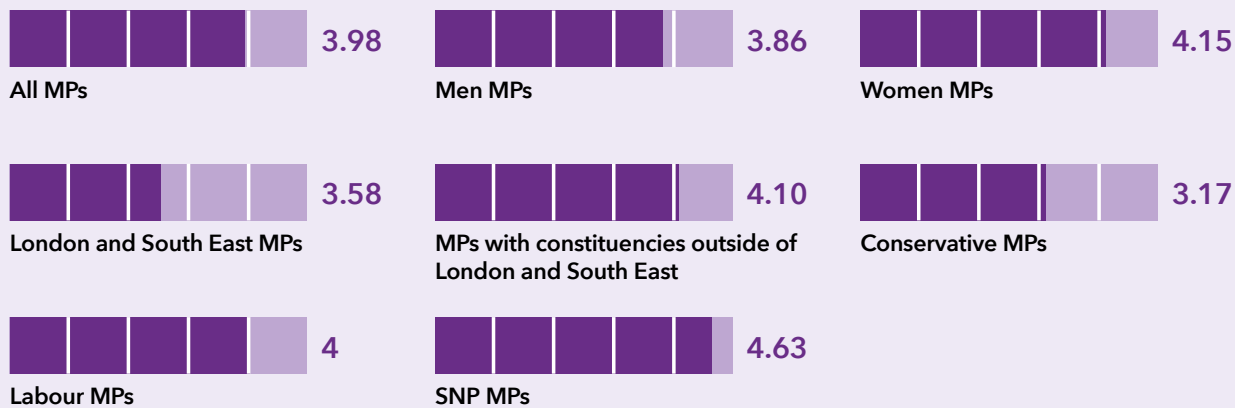
Constitutionally, it is for Members to decide how the House operates. Some Commons' Covid-19 procedures were made collectively, "A consultative, cross-party approach was exactly what was needed when bringing about such far-reaching changes to the functioning of our democratic process. It showed inclusivity and maximised the chances of maintaining public trust and support" (Russell et al 2020). At other times the Executive's preferences were agreed to by the House, (Natzler 2020). Given that the Procedure Committee has announced a general review of House practices to add to their prior commitment to reviewing proxy voting post-pandemic, there is an ideal opportunity ahead. In determining its future ways of working - a process which may take some time - decisions must be for the House of Commons to make as a legislature. In this spirit, all decisions should be a free vote, and the Government must enable the House to register its view. If the Government fails to do so, the Backbench Business Committee would constitute an alternative route to reform.<sup>16</sup>

#### BOX 5: Virtual measures MPs support continuing





**BOX 6:** Thinking about your experience of the Hybrid Parliament overall, did your experience make you feel more positively, or more negatively, about remote participation in Parliament? Average scores from scale of 1 (more negative) to 5 more positive).



## 5. THE REMOTELY REPRESENTATIVE HOUSE: RECOMMENDATIONS

*The Remotely Representative House* recommends that the House of Commons continue on a hybrid basis post-pandemic, where this is of no meaningful detriment to the institution's effectiveness. There is much virtue in parliaments having a physical footprint. Parliaments as institutions are not merely the sum of their formal rules; much is determined by their informal workings. As Philip Norton, Professor of Politics and Member of the House of Lords ([2018](#)) has stated:

**"The use of informal space... is important to the legislature for the process of institutionalisation and, to members, for socialisation into the institution, for information exchange, for lobbying, and for mobilising political support. Institutionalisation and the socialisation of members underpin the stability of the legislature. Information exchange and lobbying can impact on ministerial actions and outcomes of public policy. Mobilising political support can determine who holds office. These are hardly insubstantial consequences."**

The experiences of the Covid-19 Parliament have revealed just how important informal interaction amongst MPs, and staff and MPs, is to its effective functioning ([Russell 2020](#)). On the back of a 2019 General Election, for some MPs the Hybrid Parliament has been their main experience. Anecdotal evidence suggests new MPs may have missed important on site socialisation. At the same time, they may have benefitted from not having been socialized into those House traditions that work against *'The Good Parliament'*, such as crowded division lobbies and benches where MPs end up practically sitting on each other's laps, and late night voting.<sup>17</sup>

Designing a Hybrid Parliament for non-pandemic times offers the potential of transforming the House of Commons into one that can better realise the Inter-Parliamentary Union's representativeness, transparency, accessibility, accountability and effectiveness standards. It is an opportunity to diversify who sits in our elected institutions and transform perceptions - and indeed the reality - of how MPs' work must be done and by whom. Perhaps images of MPs sitting in their home offices or with children running onto the screen, have normalized the job of being an MP for members of the public?

Knowing that their participation need not be always physical may enable some individuals for the first time to consider standing for Parliament. Perhaps because they have caring responsibilities, live far from Westminster, or have a chronic or fluctuating health condition sometimes rendering them unable to physically attend. In diversifying who sits in the House of Commons, a Hybrid Parliament may in turn reduce disconnect between the public and their parliament and improve the quality of substantive representation, especially for those groups currently under and/or mis-represented.

*The Remotely Representative House* makes the Commons institutionally responsible for facilitating proven virtual practices and procedures and gives agency to MPs to decide how best to undertake their responsibilities as elected Members.

**RECOMMENDATION 1 (LEADER OF THE HOUSE)**

The Leader of the House should move a Motion giving effect to any recommendation of the Procedure or Liaison Committees on hybridity, giving the House time for debate and allowing for a free vote.

**DEBATES AND QUESTIONS****RECOMMENDATION 2 (SPEAKER)**

**Continue publishing 'call lists' and advanced notice and timing of Urgent Questions and Statements**

The publication of call lists facilitated hybrid participation, ensuring that Members and staff knew which MP was 'up next' to speak. Similarly, allowing for hybrid participation required advance notice and set timing of Urgent Questions and Statements. These practices brought some unexpected and welcome benefits. It has given MPs greater certainty on timetabling, enabling more efficient organizing of their workload and balancing of multiple responsibilities. Making permanent these timetabling reforms has direct advantages for the inclusiveness of the House of Commons; where appropriate these might be extended to Westminster Hall.

Regarding call lists, in pre-pandemic times Members wishing to participate in most debates would be unsure when, and if, they might be called, and could spend hours 'bobbing' up and down hoping to catch the Speaker's eye. Such practices are not only time consuming for the busy MP, they also do not recognise (gendered) bodily functions, and positively valorise those who can stay in the same seat for hours on end without food, drink or a comfort break. Such rules and norms would be outrageous and against regulations in most modern workplaces

One MP giving evidence to the Procedure Committee considered published call lists "revolutionary", speaking of her 'hidden disability' Crohn's disease:

**"...every single day I have to constantly juggle what I eat, how much I eat, when I eat, how much water I drink ...alongside managing my pain management and my diary. On days when I have been able to speak in the Chamber, say just twice—once in the morning on an urgent question or a statement, and once in the afternoon in a debate—it means that if there is not a call list, I am unable to eat anything at all. In the first four months as an MP, before we all had to go into the hybrid system, there were at least three occasions when I thought I might faint in the Chamber because I was not able to eat all day because I couldn't plan my day. The introduction of call lists has been revolutionary for me."**

**Daisy Cooper MP, Deputy Leader, Liberal Democrats**

**"At present, we organise our diaries week to week by finding out the next week's agenda in the business statement on a Thursday morning. If we have late votes on a Monday, it gives Members with caring or childcare responsibilities only one and a half working days to secure arrangements."**

**Ellie Reeves MP, Shadow Solicitor General, Labour**

“The way that this place is organised, and particularly the use of urgent questions, is a real problem for us ...we do not know when debates will start every day, because we do not know how many urgent questions there will be. We think, “Does that mean I will have to cancel or move meetings? ...It is a very inefficient use of time.”

Maria Miller MP, Former Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, Conservative

**BOX 7:** Under the Hybrid Parliament measures, there was greater certainty about timetabling, for instance, published call lists. On a scale of 1 (not at all useful) to 5 (very useful) how useful was this certainty in managing the balance between parliamentary and personal/family commitments?

	Average
All	4.02
Men MPs	3.92
Women MPs	4.19
MPs with children under 21 at home	4.2
MPs with children under 12 at home	4.23
MPs with other caring responsibilities	4.08

### RECOMMENDATION 3 (SPEAKER)

Commission research into how comparable parliaments enable ‘spontaneity’ in virtual and/or hybrid debate proceedings; identify and publish international ‘best practice’.

### RECOMMENDATION 4 (SPEAKER)

Continue with a comprehensive scheme of virtual participation in Chamber debates, based on international ‘best practice’ (allowing for intervention, for example).

Discussion of virtual participation in Chamber debates has been dominated by arguments regarding the balance between parity of participation and a lack of spontaneity in debate on the one hand, and physical presence and spontaneity on the other. In the former, the extent to which the pre-pandemic parliament was as spontaneous as supporters suggest, is queried: Members frequently read out speeches and interventions in ways historically frowned upon. Parliamentary TV means MPs are often engaged with the Chamber even when not sitting on the green benches ([Procedure Committee Oral Evidence 07/10/2020](#)). Nor should the ‘great parliamentary debater’ be necessarily given primacy. As mentioned above, there are many different ways of doing the job of an MP well - the great debater is only one type.

“It is incumbent on all MPs to engage in the whole debate ...because having knowledge of what other people have said informs your contribution within a debate. [...] but often people are in the Chamber and they are on their phones and looking at other papers as well ...I also think it is really important that MPs have an equal opportunity to represent their constituents. There is no constituency that should have preference over another, and we come here to make those representations. It is absolutely vital that we make it as inclusive as possible for people to be able to participate.”

Rachael Maskell MP, Labour

In the latter case, the cost of excluding some Members is portrayed as an acceptable price worth paying for higher quality parliamentary debate, and above all the effective scrutiny of the Government. These are not insignificant claims and warrant further investigation. A firm evidential basis for any continuation of Hybrid Parliamentary procedures regarding debates, and of any future extension, is necessary. Lessons can be learnt from other parliaments where virtual interventions in debates are in place. For instance, in the Canadian Parliament, MPs virtually ‘raise their hand’ presenting the Chair Occupant with a list of who wishes to intervene.<sup>18</sup> Similar spontaneity is found in the Brazilian Parliament’s system whereby Members can indicate via the virtual system that they wish to speak.<sup>19</sup>

#### RECOMMENDATION 4 (SPEAKER)

**Systematically and comprehensively monitor and report the speeches and interventions in debates, questions, private members’ bills and other parliamentary activities by MPs’ sex/gender and other major social characteristics - and, where hybridity continues by physical and remote participation<sup>20</sup>.**

Concerns about parity of participation across the Commons have been voiced for some time. Some MPs have spoken about feeling excluded from a Chamber that provides insufficient seating, forces them to be squashed between, and onto, the laps of others; makes little accommodation for physically disabled Members, with wheelchair users left on the edge of the Chamber; and is characterized by highly adversarial and at times personalized and confrontational interactions (Illie 2018, Lovenduski 2012). Some MPs are known, anecdotally, to avoid the ‘yah boo’ theatre of its set pieces, notably PMQs.

The Speaker’s Office collates data on MPs’ participation - Recommendation 2 of 2016 *The Good Parliament* Report. In light of the hybrid proceedings to date, and in any future extensions, new procedures or re-trials, the Speaker should ensure that data is collected and analysed to determine how remote modes of participation have or have not enabled diverse MPs’ equal and effective participation. Ensuring parity of treatment is vital as some groups of MPs may use virtual measures more than others. Initial House of Commons library data has shown women MPs participated online more frequently than men MPs.<sup>21</sup> Such findings beg additional questions regarding MPs’ reasoning - childcare responsibilities, travel distance, family shielding etc - and further analysis of the benefits and/or limitations of those decisions. It might, for example, be that physical participation is desirable when discussing an issue of a personal nature or when the close support of colleagues is wanted (Childs 2013).

## VOTING: BY PROXY AND REMOTELY

### RECOMMENDATION 10 (PROCEDURE COMMITTEE)

Following the permanent change to Standing Orders relating to baby leave, recommend the extension of proxy voting to other categories of Member: inter alia, those suffering from serious illness, those with caring responsibilities, and those who are bereaved.

### RECOMMENDATION 13 (PROCEDURE COMMITTEE)

Invite the participation of the Women and Equalities Committee as the Procedure Committee reviews the extension of proxy voting and undertakes its general review of parliamentary practices post-Covid.

### RECOMMENDATION 19 (WOMEN AND EQUALITIES COMMITTEE)

**Work with the Procedure Committee in its two Covid-related reviews**

*The Remotely Representative House* commends the House of Commons for making proxy voting permanent for baby leave in September 2020 and welcomes the Procedure Committee's forthcoming review of its extension. Whilst arguments for Members on baby leave are distinct,<sup>22</sup> the extension to other categories of MPs, including those suffering illness, those with caring responsibilities, and those who are bereaved, is desirable and timely.

In applauding the Procedure Committee's work on proxy voting *The Remotely Representative House* encourages the participation of the Women's Equality Committee in the former's forthcoming review of both proxy voting's extension and their general post-Covid review of parliamentary practices to bring together both Committees' expertise. It should be possible to design a system for proxy voting that accommodates concerns relating to MPs' privacy and anonymity, self-certification, and the role of the Whips.

### RECOMMENDATION 11 (PROCEDURE COMMITTEE)

**As part of its post-pandemic review of proxy voting, reconsider the introduction of remote voting for all qualifying Members (including those who may become entitled to a proxy in the future).**

### RECOMMENDATION 14 (PROCEDURE COMMITTEE)

**Until all Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, press the Leader of the House to act on their recommendation to reintroduce remote voting for all members, combining both on-estate and off-estate remote voting.**

The UK House of Commons, albeit for two weeks, allowed Members to vote electronically, both on and off estate, in what has been considered a 'world beating system'. Short-lived, it was soon replaced by the wider use of proxy. Pandemic proxy voting - as opposed to baby leave proxies - has been criticised on a number of fronts (see Box 8).

Although many problems associated with pandemic proxies could be overcome with greater technological investment, it begs the question of whether re-introducing remote (electronic) voting would not just be a better system.<sup>23</sup>

**BOX 8: Criticisms of Pandemic Proxies**

- Categorization of Members permitted a proxy - which MPs should qualify, e.g., ongoing illness not linked to Covid-19.
- Self-certification and trust - should MPs have to state why they need the proxy and prove this to be the case to Mr Speaker?
- 'En masse' accumulation of power to the Whips - e.g., one Whip having 203 proxy votes to cast.
- Time consuming and additional work for House Staff who are currently working under very difficult conditions - for MPs emailing confirming they are voting for another MP(s) and for staff transferring the information over.
- Open to human error: laborious process leaves many gaps for error, e.g., MPs fail to email House Staff.

**"[Pandemic proxy voting is] nowhere near as good, effective, simple and efficient as the e-voting system through the MemberHub previously"**

**Tommy Sheppard MP, SNP Shadow Leader of the House**

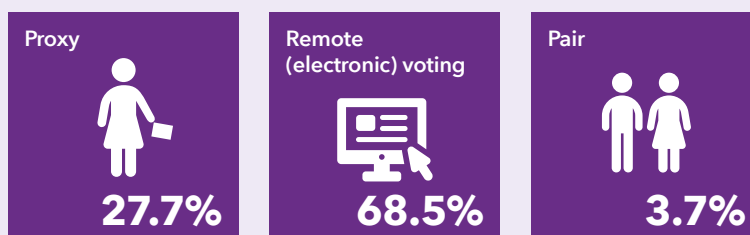
**"The taxpayer has already invested heavily in the technology for remote democracy. We know that it works, and it works really well. It is working in the Welsh Parliament and the Scottish Parliament, so why not in the Westminster Parliament? ...The most obvious question is, why is remote voting not being used in the House of Commons? Why are so many constituents not being represented and millions of voters left voiceless?"**

**Dawn Butler MP, Labour**

Electronic voting has been proven to work at Westminster; technical and security concerns have been assuaged.<sup>24</sup> The MemberHub system of electronic voting - enabling MPs to vote from anywhere - was robust, accurate, reliable, and results were published almost instantaneously. The Procedure Committee has been clear in recommending the re-introduction of remote voting during the pandemic.

**BOX 9: In the future, if you were unable to attend Parliament for any reason aside from baby leave e.g. other caring responsibilities or illness, which of the following would be your preferred method for voting? (Select one).**

N=54



**RECOMMENDATION 21 (RESTORATION & RENEWAL (R&R) BODY)**

**During R&R, provide remote voting for all Members and centre hybrid and remote participation in all planning for a restored House of Commons.**

In light of likely disruption associated with Parliament's restoration and renewal (R&R), whether MPs decant or not, *The Remotely Representative House* recommends that electronic voting is reintroduced during any substantial building works. Similarly, as the House undergoes the next phase of R&R, and given the sunk costs associated with the Hybrid Parliament, the R&R body would be acting rashly were it not to examine how remote proceedings might facilitate an efficient and cost-effective renewal process.

Further advocacy of off-estate electronic voting confronts the popular view that physical division lobbies are critical sites for backbenchers to lobby Ministers. Electronic voting can entail MPs casting their vote from any place, up and down the country. An alternative system could require attendance at multiple 'on-estate' voting stations throughout the whole parliamentary estate. The latter would ensure Ministers leave their Whitehall offices and be physically available to backbenchers' lobbying. Given the lack of strong evidence showing the effect of physical divisions on Ministerial responsiveness compared to electronic voting in non-pandemic times, the Procedure Committee should investigate the option of fully remote voting.

**COMMITTEES****RECOMMENDATION 15 (LIAISON COMMITTEE)**

**Recommend that individual members of Select Committees may participate remotely and press the Leader of the House to so act.**

To ensure all Members can fully participate across the House, it should be accepted practice that Select Committee members can participate remotely. The technology to support this has been proven to work given the success of Select Committees' hybrid proceedings during 2020. It has also enabled Departmental Select Committees to meet outside their 'normal' Tuesday/Wednesday days and times.

**RECOMMENDATION 17 (LIAISON COMMITTEE)**

**Select Committees should be supported in the continuation of the more extensive remote participation of witnesses practised during Covid-19.**

There are long-standing criticisms of the lack of diversity in Select Committee witnesses. Statistics show a very 'London Centric' set of male and white witnesses ([Geddes 2020](#); [House of Commons Liaison Committee 2019](#)). More extensive virtual participation is an opportunity to transform who gives evidence to Committees. The House could include - and connect with - those from all over the UK, especially those unable, for whatever reason, to travel, often at short notice, to Westminster. There is, then, no reason for 'hard to reach', 'easy to ignore' groups, and those with 'lived experience' of issues, not to be able to voice their interests. Virtual participation is similarly advantageous for international witnesses and saves money. It is also possible that witnesses may feel less intimidated online than in the more formal Westminster setting ([Procedure Committee Oral Evidence 08/07/20](#), [McKinnon and Dustin 2021](#)).

There are cases, nevertheless, where a witness's physical presence is preferable or indeed necessary. For witnesses giving evidence on matters of urgency or national importance (for example Mike Ashley on Sports Direct working practices, Rupert Murdoch on phone-hacking, and then Home Secretary Amber Rudd on immigration targets), face-to-face, sustained pressure - where MPs can 'eyeball' them - might be critical to get comprehensive answers. Accordingly, *The Remotely Representative House* recommends that it is for Select Committees to decide whether a witness must come before them in person or not.



**RECOMMENDATION 16 (LIAISON COMMITTEE)**

**Recommend that Select Committees (under its purview) may meet fully virtually, by agreement of the Committee.**

Select Committees undertake their work in different ways ([Geddes 2020](#)). In a Hybrid Parliament, some Committees may decide to run extensively or even fully virtually for various reasons: for example, the Chair's and members' personal preference or need; witness diversity and reach; workload management; timetabling and room bookings. Others will prefer to maintain in person or hybrid proceedings, perhaps because they prioritize the informal interactions enabled by physical meetings.

**RECOMMENDATION 18 (LIAISON COMMITTEE)**

**Research should be undertaken either (a) in-house or (b) through the commissioning of independent research, to assess the relative effectiveness of virtual, hybrid and in-person Select Committees, including the effect on witness diversity, Member cohesion, committee efficiency, and scrutiny and impact.**

Whilst virtual proceedings may present significant opportunities for improving inclusion and diversity it should not be presumed that equal participation means effective participation for all. Virtual interactions may reproduce and/or exacerbate existing inequalities of conversational practice ([Shaw 2020](#)) that map onto social characteristics such as gender, race and class as well as exclusions based on geography. *The Remotely Representative House* recommends research on the effect of differences in Committees' organisation on their effectiveness in the round.

**RECOMMENDATION 12 (PROCEDURE COMMITTEE)**

**As part of its post-Covid 'general review of House practices', determine the viability of hybrid General Committees.**

**Some of us took part in a trial running of a Bill Committee, including interventions and a full debate, which worked perfectly well. That might have been another way of ensuring that Government business was able to move forward.**

**Liz Twist MP, Labour**

In contrast to the success of Departmental Select Committees' hybrid operation in 2020, similar procedures were not implemented to extend virtual participation to Public Bill Committees (and other "general committees" such as delegated legislation committees). There was some criticism of this given that the trial of virtual Public Bill Committees during the Covid-19 Parliament demonstrated the technical capacity to do so. To ensure parity of participation across the House, the viability of virtual participation in Public Bill Committees and Delegated Legislation Committees should be included in the Procedure Committee's examination of House practices under Covid-19.

## INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A DIVERSITY SENSITIVE HOUSE OF COMMONS

### RECOMMENDATION 6 (SPEAKER)

Establish a new Reference Group to lead on the Diversity Sensitive Parliaments agenda.

### RECOMMENDATION 8 (HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION)

Restate the House's collective responsibility for enhancing representation and inclusion by endorsing the new Reference Group and formally acknowledging *The Remotely Representative House*.

The House of Commons is a highly complex organization. Power is dispersed amongst many key players - governmental and parliamentary - with their own, frequently opposing, interests. Unlike other parliaments, there is no 'central coordinating body' ([Procedure Committee Oral Evidence 08/07/20](#)), no CEO to 'flick a switch' and bring about change. Thus, the House's governance structures and institutional capacity to bring about systematic change is constrained.

Many recent successes regarding gender and diversity sensitivity can be attributed to collaborations between the Commons Reference Group for Representation and Inclusion, the Mother of the House, the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, and the Chair of the Procedure Committee. As the House reflects on the Covid-19 experience, it is critical for the new Speaker to show leadership and establish his own Reference Group.

A new Reference Group would constitute a core body to ensure the right lessons are learnt by relevant decision-makers and to hold other actors to account, so that all hybrid proceedings that benefit Members individually and the House collectively are maintained and, where appropriate, extended. Formal Commission acknowledgment would moreover provide symbolic support for the Group, increasing its capacity to effect change.

### RECOMMENDATION 20 (WOMEN IN POLITICS APPG; WPLP; CONSERVATIVE WOMEN'S FORUM; ALL WOMEN MPS)

Establish a formal Parliamentary Women's Caucus to lead on the gender sensitive House of Commons agenda and support a new Reference Group and the diversity sensitive parliaments agenda.

A key dynamic of recent gender and diversity reforms observed at Westminster has been the role of women MPs across the House - termed gendered parliamentarianism (Childs 2021). Most notably in the introduction of proxy voting for MPs on baby leave, where a consensus built amongst women MPs challenged the House to do better by them. Unlike other parliaments with women's caucuses - over 80 according to the IPU<sup>25</sup> - the UK Parliament relies upon a combination of party organizations, the Women in Parliament APPG, and personal networks and friendships. By establishing a permanent body with official, institutional status, women MPs will be better positioned to hold the House, and its presiding officer, Mr Speaker, to account.<sup>26</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 9 (HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION)**

**Endorse an 'online first' principle for 'everyday' practices (e.g. tabling amendments, tabling Ten-Minute Rule Bills).**

In addition to significant and widely recognized changes to how the House of Commons functioned during 2020, a myriad of 'everyday' practices moved online to facilitate hybrid proceedings. These would need to continue. An 'online first' principle would maintain that, where possible, the norm would be to carry out these everyday practices online, such as the tabling of amendments or Ten-Minute Rule Bills. Behind-the-scenes benefits of online working may not be directly observable to all Members but have included efficiency and effectiveness, cost-saving, staff and Member time-management, and better working relationships between staff and Members.

**RECOMMENDATION 7 (SPEAKER)**

**When the UK Parliament (Commons and Lords) next undertakes its Inter-Parliamentary Union Gender Sensitive Parliaments Audit, include The Remotely Representative House's recommendations.**

Parliament's commitment (by both Houses) to become a better institution is aided by its participation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union regarding the GSP audit. The first audit in an ongoing process was in 2018. Given the impact of Covid-19 on the workings of parliaments - and the attention of international organisations to how these impacts are themselves gendered - the next review should additionally include these Covid-19 related recommendations drawn from UK experiences.<sup>27</sup>

## APPENDIX 1. MP SURVEY DETAILS

Survey was fielded from 26th November 2020 to 2nd January 2021. The survey was sent to all MPs. The response rate was 8.8% (57 MPs).

Note: the MPs that responded were disproportionately from certain groups, most notably a high number of SNP MPs. Whilst having an inevitable impact on results it is also interesting in itself that SNP MPs, whose constituencies are far from Westminster, were motivated to respond to the survey, although partisan motivations may also have been in play.

### Survey Sample

		%	N
	Sex (Female)	36.8%	21
	Average age	55 years-old	
	White (British, Irish, English, Welsh, Scottish or any other white background)	86%	49
	Identify as having a disability	5.3%	3
<b>Party</b>	Conservative	24.6%	14
	Labour	26.3%	15
	Scottish National Party (SNP)	28.1%	16
	Liberal Democrat	8.8%	5
	Plaid Cymru	3.5%	2
	Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)	1.8%	1
	Alliance	1.8%	1
<b>Constituency Location</b>	East of England	0.00%	0
	East Midlands	0.00%	0
	London and Greater London	14.0%	8
	North East	0.00%	0
	North West	10.5%	6
	Northern Ireland	3.5%	2
	Scotland	31.6%	18
	South East	7.0%	4
	South West	3.5%	2
	Wales	8.8%	5
	West Midlands	5.3%	3
	Yorkshire & the Humber	10.5%	6

## ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-54925320>
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/02/flora-needs-me-mp-caring-for-wife-hits-out-at-jacob-rees-moggs-plan>
3. This updates *The Good Parliament* Report's Recommendation 2.
4. Procedure Committee Report HC1031 Paragraph 16
5. For a comprehensive account of all Parliaments' proceedings under Covid-19 see <https://www.ipu.org/country-compilation-parliamentary-responses-pandemic>.
6. The term '*The Good Parliament*' comes from Childs 2016, the characteristics are from the IPU [http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy\\_en.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy_en.pdf).
7. See ongoing Procure Committee Inquiry, Hansard Society Report, and Institute for Government Report
8. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7483/>
9. <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/election-post-mortem-number-of-disabled-mps-may-have-fallen-to-just-five/>
10. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/874507/family-resources-survey-2018-19.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874507/family-resources-survey-2018-19.pdf)
11. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7483/>
12. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>
13. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/06/mps-return-to-parliament-westminster-jacob-rees-mogg-virtual>
14. <https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/pairing/>
15. <https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/nodding-through-on-the-nod/>
16. In debates in proxy voting for baby leave Harriet Harman MP threatened a backbench motion if the Leader did not act in a timely fashion.
17. See work on Feminist Institutionalism e.g. Krook and Mackay 2011, Kenny 2007
18. Canadian Parliament Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs Report, July 2020
19. [https://virtual.camara.leg.br/static/arquivos/2020-04-15-VIRTUAL\\_PLENARY\\_CHAMBER\\_OF\\_DEPUTIES\\_OF\\_BRAZIL.pdf](https://virtual.camara.leg.br/static/arquivos/2020-04-15-VIRTUAL_PLENARY_CHAMBER_OF_DEPUTIES_OF_BRAZIL.pdf)
20. This updates *The Good Parliament* Report's Recommendation 2.
21. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/coronavirus-mps-use-of-virtual-participation-and-proxy-voting-by-gender/>
22. For example, pregnancy is not an illness. Critically, MPs as office holders are not entitled to statutory maternity leave. Proxy voting enables them to choose to reduce their engagement with parliamentary business on a day-to-day basis.
23. In person voting during the pandemic was criticised for being time consuming for Members and staff, and for risking public health (e.g. Phillipa Whitford MP comments). Post-pandemic these would be eased, although criticisms about efficiency and crowding remain.
24. Both the House of Commons (briefly) and the House of Lords for a longer period have implemented successful remote voting systems (House of Lords Library)
25. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/guidelines-womens-caucuses>
26. WEC, a DSC, holds the Government to account, even as it has played a critical role on questions of parliamentary reform since its establishment.
27. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/a-primer-for-parliamentary-action-gender-sensitive-responses-to-covid-19>; [https://issuu.com/the-parliamentarian/docs/cwp\\_gender\\_sensitizing\\_guidelines](https://issuu.com/the-parliamentarian/docs/cwp_gender_sensitizing_guidelines)



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