



Factsheet P16 Procedure Series

Revised June 2003

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House of Commons Information Office

The Vote Bundle

The daily working documents of the House of Commons are known collectively as the “Vote Bundle” or just “the Vote”. It consists of a set of papers, some printed on white, and others on blue, containing information about the business of the day, the transactions of the previous day’s sitting, and notices for future days. These papers play an important role in informing Members of Parliament of what is happening in the House of Commons and are the only authoritative source for most items.

This Factsheet is available on the internet through:
<http://www.parliament.uk/factsheets>

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Introduction

This factsheet looks at the contents of the “Vote Bundle”, the working papers of the House of Commons. The pages of the Vote Bundle are a vital source of information on recent and future proceedings in the House and this Factsheet is an attempt to guide users through their many pages.

The individual sections of the Vote Bundle form part of long series, each having a separate running number starting at the beginning of the parliamentary session. The blue sheets usually contain notices relating to future days' business. The individual sections are:

- Summary agenda
- Order of Business
- Future Business
- Papers available today
- Order of Business in Westminster Hall
- Standing Committee proceedings
- Votes and Proceedings
- Private Business
- Notices of Motions
- Notices of Amendments
- Questions for Oral or Written Answer (The Question Book)

Availability and distribution

The Vote Bundle is distributed to Members and is available from the Vote Office early each sitting day. Monday's business is available on Saturday mornings.

Members of the public may purchase the Vote at a cost of 18p per page either from the Parliamentary Bookshop (020-7219 3890) at the House of Commons or from The Stationery Office Limited (0345 585463). Two formats are available, the individual parts not being sold separately. These are the full Vote, comprising all sections of the Vote Bundle; and the short Vote, consisting of the Order Paper sections, Votes and Proceedings, Future Business and Private Business Papers. Members of the public attending Standing Committee meetings on Public Bills are provided with copies of Standing Committee Papers (see below), containing notices of amendments, free of charge. Parts 1 and 2 of the Order Book containing written questions (see below) are also available to purchase for the same price.

The Summary Agenda, the Order of Business questions for oral and written answer (the Question Book) and Votes and Proceedings are also available at the parliament website: www.parliament.uk.

This guide is intended as a brief introduction to the arrangements of the various papers that make up the Vote Bundle. Many of the individual sections and some of the procedures referred to are given fuller explanation in other titles in the **Factsheet** series; where appropriate these are cited in the text.

Recent changes

In June 1997 the Select Committee on Modernisation was appointed to look at ways the practices and procedures of the House of Commons could be modernised. Part of its remit was to make the Order Paper easier to understand. The committee decided to reform the presentation of the daily working documents of the House of which the Order Paper was part.

The Speaker made a statement on 31 July 1997 in which she commented¹:

I am content with the Committee's broad approach in seeking to reform the House's working papers. Accordingly some changes will take place in the appearance of those papers, with effect from the end of the recess. I should emphasise that my approval is based on the fact that no procedural changes are involved. What is proposed is a matter of presentation, in an effort to achieve greater clarity.

The main changes introduced were: a new summary agenda appearing daily as the first page; more timings and explanations included where possible; clarifying the language used; new sections on future business and working papers published each day; and the removal of questions for written answer on the day in question to appear in a revised Order Book.

Following the adoption of the proposals of the Modernisation Committee's second report of 1999/2000 [HC 589], new sessional orders have been adopted for an experimental period. These allow for some divisions that would normally take place after the moment of interruption to be deferred until 3.30pm on the next sitting Wednesday (see **Factsheet** No P9, Divisions).

Any questions to be decided by deferred divisions appear on a pink ballot paper in the Vote Bundle on the following Wednesday. The results are announced in the House and are noted in the Votes and Proceedings.

The Vote Bundle

Summary agenda

One of the changes introduced by the Modernisation Committee was a new first page providing a summary of the day's business under the heading Summary Agenda (see example in Appendix). Where procedurally possible, information about timings is given. These are indicative only, representing the maximum amount of time available, not necessarily the time the item will take. Sittings in Westminster Hall are included on this page. Furthermore, it should be remembered that business in the House does sometimes change at short notice. Memoranda are now placed on the back of the Summary Agenda, and include various miscellaneous items of information, e.g. the dates by which applications for adjournment debates are to be submitted to Madam Speaker's Office.

Order of business

The Order of Business lists business set down for today's sitting: it is in effect the House's agenda. The arrangement follows the normal order in which business is conducted, although not all items taken on the floor of the House require to be notified in the Order of Business. Thus, for example, the subjects of statements by Ministers, urgent questions and applications made under Standing Order 24 for emergency debate which are taken at 3.30pm (Monday), 12.30pm (Tuesday to Thursday) and 11.00 am on Fridays do not appear in the Order of Business. (The decision on statements and Urgent Questions is taken only on the morning of the sitting and is advertised on the television monitors in the House from 1.00pm (Monday), 11.00am (Tuesdays to Thursdays) and 10.30am on Friday). The House of Commons Information Office can provide details after this hour).

¹ HC Deb 31 July 1997 c45

The following headings are used to describe the main categories of business:

Prayers

Prayers are said at the start of the day's sitting, followed by; reports of the Queen's answers to addresses; any formal communications by the Speaker; Motions for new writs; private business; presentation of Public Petitions (Fridays only) and Motion for unopposed returns. The above are occasional items and on most days Prayers are followed immediately by the main business of the day.

End of day adjournment debates

A ballot is held weekly for these, on Wednesday mornings, and allocations for the forthcoming week are first listed in Future Business part A published on Thursday and also placed on the parliament internet site.

Private business

Private Bills, unlike Public Bills that affect everyone, apply only to a particular area, company or undertaking. They are often initiated by local authorities or private companies, and are presented after a petition from the persons interested in promoting the Bill.

All Private Bills are initially dealt with after Prayers, at 2.35pm on Mondays and 11.35am on Tuesdays to Thursdays. If it is unopposed the Bill goes through the relevant parliamentary stages. If it has been objected to, then time is eventually found for a debate. It is usual for the Chairman of Ways and Means to nominate 7.00pm on a Monday (4.00pm on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday), in which case proceedings may continue until 10.00pm. This will appear in the Order of Business as Opposed Private Business when it is scheduled to take place.

For further information about Private Business see **Factsheet** Nos L4 and L5.

Questions for Oral Answer

These appear every day except Friday when no time is set aside for questions on the floor of the House. Each government department answers on set days in a four-week cycle. The order of questions is sent out with the Vote Bundle about a fortnight before each recess and is noted in the House of Commons Weekly Information Bulletin. Since 21 May 1997 questions to the Prime Minister have taken place on Wednesdays from midday until 12.30pm.

For further information about questions see **Factsheet** P1.

Urgent questions and ministerial statements

Any Urgent Questions and statements by Ministers follow at 12.30pm. An Urgent Question is one for which no previous notice has been given, relating to a matter of public importance or the arrangement of business. An Urgent Question may be taken at the end of question time if it has been submitted to the Speaker and has satisfied the above conditions. The Minister concerned must be notified before the Question is asked.

Preliminary business

This could be any of the following:

- i) Government Bills or private Members' bills presented without debate.
- ii) Ten-minute rule motions made under Standing Order 23 on which the proposer makes a short speech. There may also be a short speech against the motion and a division. For further

information about private Members' bills see **Factsheet** No L2.

iii) Motions to be decided without debate to refer statutory instruments to standing committees; to refer matters, and occasionally bills, to the Welsh Grand Committee; or to refer legislative proposals and other matters to the Northern Ireland committee.

Main business

This may start as early as 12.30pm if there are no statements or preliminary business, or it could be an hour or two later if there are statements or Private Notice Questions. The main items include:

- Government bills - whether second readings, committee of the whole House, report stages or third readings. For further information about the stages of bills see **Factsheet** No L1.
- Government motions – whether substantive motions inviting the House to agree to a particular proposal or motions for the adjournment, which enable the House to debate a chosen topic without coming to a formal conclusion. Other Government motions are taken "forthwith" (without debate) because they have already been discussed in Standing Committee.
- Opposition Day debates – on 20 days a year, 3 of which are taken by parties other than the official Opposition. The subject of a debate is chosen by the Opposition, which puts a motion before the House.
- Private Members' bills - 13 Fridays in each session are allocated for discussion of private Members' bills. For further information about Private Members' Bills see **Factsheet** No L4.
- Business motions - motions relating to the business of the House, usually to allow debate to proceed, though opposed, after the usual hour for conclusion of business either indefinitely or for a fixed time. Such motions are often moved by the Government at the moment of interruption (10pm on Monday, 7pm on Tuesday and Wednesday, 6pm on Thursday) to be decided without debate.

Adjournment debate

At the end of each day there is an adjournment debate, which normally lasts for half an hour, the subject of which is shown with the Member who is proposing to raise it. A ballot for the half-hour adjournment debates, with the exception of Thursday's debate, which is in the Speaker's gift, is held weekly, on Thursday mornings. Details of allocations for the forthcoming week are given in parts A or D (though those for the forthcoming week are always in part A of the Future Business paper).

Committee Meetings

This comprises a list of Committees meeting that day, including Standing Committees, Select Committees, Joint Committees and Committees on Private Bills. Standing (legislative) Committees meet mainly on Tuesdays and Thursdays: Select (inquiry) Committees can meet on any day, but mostly meet on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The time and the place of each meeting and whether it is to be held in public or private are given. A list of witnesses is normally given for those Committees taking evidence in public.

For further information about Committees see **Factsheets** P2 and L6.

Written ministerial statements to be made today

Only a small proportion of the day's written questions appear here. They are the ones of which notice was given only the day before, and which have therefore not previously appeared in the blue notice paper. These questions were usually arranged questions put down in order to

enable a Minister to make a prepared response but from the 2002-03 session these have largely been replaced by written statements.

Standing Committee notices

The principal items covered under this heading are notice of the intending starting date of Standing Committee proceedings on public bills or changes in such arrangements previously announced.

Future business

This comprises five sections:

A - Business for Future Days - This includes all the business for the period covered by the most recent business statement from the Leader of the House. Such statements are usually made on Thursdays, and cover one or sometimes two weeks' business. In addition to the main business announced by the Leader, the Departments answering oral questions, ten-minute rule motions and the subjects of adjournment debates are listed. It should be noted that business might be changed up to the rising of the House on the day before it is to be taken and is therefore provisional.

B - Business to be taken in Westminster Hall - this is a new section to reflect the introduction of sittings in Westminster hall in November 1999. The debates for the three days on which such debates take place – Tuesdays and Wednesdays (9.30am to 11.30am and 2.00pm to 4.30pm) and Thursdays (2.30pm to 5.30pm) - listed. Those for Tuesday and Wednesday are adjournment debates. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays there are three debates lasting for up to 1 and a half hours and two half hour debates. The longer debates are intended to be more general debates involving a number of Members. Applications for these have to be made to the Speaker's Office by 7pm on the Tuesday of the previous week; ballots are held on Wednesday morning. Members can apply for both a general debate and a short one, but will not be successful in more than one ballot. Select committees may put their reports forward for debate at a Wednesday morning adjournment debate in Westminster Hall.

The debate on Thursday is appointed by the Chairman of Ways and Means and announced by the Leader of the House in the weekly business statement. Some of these debates are on select committee reports.

C - Remaining Orders and Notices - This section (formerly known as "Remaining Orders") comprises business, almost entirely government business, formally set down for today, but not expected to be taken today. (These may include items included in the business statement and therefore listed in section A.)

The main items are Government bills awaiting second reading or report stage and Statutory Instruments awaiting the approval of the House. Motions to nominate Members to the departmentally related Select Committees are listed for at least one day before they are taken on the floor of the House. This provides a rough guide to the Government's legislative programme and to the business awaiting discussion in the House during Government time. The order in which items appear in the Remaining Orders is not indicative of the order in which they will eventually be taken.

D - Other Future Business - This section consists of items of business set down for specific days after the period covered by the Leader's statement, and includes notice of forthcoming Ten

Minute Rule motions, business set down for Private Members' Bill Fridays and notification of Wednesday mornings set aside for debate on Select Committee reports (chosen by the Liaison Committee).

E - Notices of Written Ministerial Statements – These were introduced at the start of the 2002-03 session. Ministers may give up to five days notice of the intention to make a written Ministerial statement, although such statements can be made without notice.

Order of Business Westminster Hall

A page giving details of the subject and timings of the days sitting in Westminster Hall.

Papers available today

A list of the sections of the Vote Bundle that day, in the order they appear, with page locations.

Standing Committee Papers

Standing committee and committee of the whole House papers appear next in the Vote Bundle on white sheets (see also Notices of Amendments below). They comprise:

- Amendment lists: for consideration at Committee stage today; these appear normally on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Amendments are numbered in the order in which they relate to the Bill when the first set of amendments is published; subsequent amendments are numbered in the order in which the printer receives them. There are separate sequences for each Bill being taken by a Committee of the whole House, in the Chamber, (headed Consideration of Bill) and by each Standing Committee meeting that day (headed with the name of the relevant committee, e.g. Standing Committee A).
- Order Papers for the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Grand Committees are included here.
- Proceedings of yesterday's Standing Committee meetings: normally on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. These are issued after each sitting of the Standing Committee on a bill and detail the proceedings of the committee. They give the full text of any amendment to the part of the bill considered at that sitting and show whether it was agreed to, negated or not called, not moved or withdrawn. The fact that a decision was made on division is indicated but not the Members voting. At the end of the proceedings the next sitting of the Committee (if any) is given.
- Motions to be considered by European Standing Committees: Documents recommended by the Select Committee on European Legislation for further consideration by the House are generally referred to one of the two European Standing Committees, and motions to be considered by these committees are recorded here.

For further information on standing committees and European legislation see **Factsheets** L6 and L11.

Votes and Proceedings

Sometimes known just as "the Vote", the Votes and Proceedings is a formal record of the proceedings of the House on the previous day's sitting. It does not record business that is strictly informal involving no act or decision of the House, such as questions, points of order, ministerial statements or Speaker's rulings.

The Votes and Proceedings are compiled by the Clerks of the Journal Office from minutes taken in the Chamber by the Clerks at the Table; it is corrected and cumulated annually into the

published Journal of the House of Commons.

The order in which the main items of business appear in the Vote is largely the same as the order in which they have been taken in the House (also the order in which they appeared in the previous day's Order of Business). So-called book entries (i.e. those which are deemed to have been transacted) normally appear after private business, taken immediately after prayers and before the main business of the day. These will include messages from the Lords, references to laying of papers before the House, reports from the Committee of Selection, or reports from Select Committees. Fuller details of these items are given in several Appendices to the Votes and Proceedings, which are described below. Reports from Standing Committees are also listed before the main business of the day.

Other business recorded in the Votes and Proceedings may include the presentation of bills, and any motions put to the House including those made in connection with proceedings on legislation. In the case of amendments to bills, the full text of the amendment is printed only if the amendment is negatived or withdrawn; only the number of the amendment and not the text is printed if the amendment is agreed to, unless it has been agreed on division. The results of divisions are given but a full division list appears only in the Official Report. The presentation of public petitions is recorded but not the text, which is usually printed at a later date, and circulated as an occasional supplement to the Votes and Proceedings.

Appendices to Votes and Proceedings

Appendix I, Papers: This lists the papers presented or laid before the House by government departments. They are under three headings:

- i) Papers subject to affirmative resolution: these are often laid in draft and will only come into force, or remain in force, if approved by both Houses.
- ii) Papers subject to negative resolution: these come into effect if the House passes no resolution within 40 days annulling them. Motions to annul them are known as "prayers" and are published as "Early Day Motions" (see below).
- iii) Other papers: these include papers departments are required to lay before the House under statute (i.e. "by Act"); command papers, which Departments may lay at their own discretion; and other papers laid by the Speaker or the Clerk of the House.

For further information on House of Commons papers, command papers and statutory instruments see **Factsheets** P12, P13 and L7.

Appendix II, Standing Committees: This appears two or three times a week, particularly on Thursday mornings. It contains the reports of the Committee of Selection, showing the names of Members nominated to serve on Standing Committees, Committees on Private Bills and the Standing Orders Committee including names of chairmen.

For further information on Standing Committees see **Factsheet** L6.

Appendix III, Select Committees: On days where there is no report from the Committee of Selection, this would appear as Appendix II. It records reports and other papers, including minutes of evidence and memoranda presented by select committees (evidence is typically not published until 4 to 6 weeks later). This is the first official note that a select committee has agreed a report, although publication of the report will usually not take place until several

working days later.

For further information on select committees see **Factsheet P2**.

Supplement to the Votes and Proceedings: This final section is circulated occasionally. It contains texts of any petitions presented by Members on behalf of individuals or organisations, or Government observations on these petitions.

For further information on public petitions see **Factsheet P7**.

Notices of Questions

Questions tabled during yesterday's sitting for answer on future days appear in a separate blue section with its own numbering sequence.

These "Blues" are the first notice of questions tabled the previous day for oral answer ten sitting days (usually a calendar fortnight) later. Questions for oral answer are marked with an asterisk. They also contain all questions put down the previous day for written answer at any future date. Written questions come in two categories. Those marked with an "N" (for answer on a named day) must be answered on that day, although sometimes only a holding reply is given on the named day. (Only the eventual substantive answer and not any holding reply will appear in Hansard). Questions not requiring a written answer on the day named may be answered on that day, but in practice are answered within one working week. It is from this section that government departments start to work on preparing ministerial replies. However, questions on the Blues are sometimes subsequently corrected. The Blues are also the first opportunity for Members of Parliament to see if they have been placed high enough in the oral questions ballot to be reached during question time a fortnight later, and for them to check the correct printing of their questions.

Transferred Questions

If the government department to which a question has been tabled decides to transfer it to another government department, the question is reprinted with [Transferred] after it. If a Member decides to withdraw a question it is marked [Withdrawn], and if a Member decides to change an oral question to a written one it is marked [Unstarred].

The questions are listed in this section by the day they are set down for a reply, and in alphabetical order of Department under each day. Members can obtain a full cumulated list of all outstanding questions up to two weeks ahead from the Vote Office; this Order Book is published every day but is not included in the Vote Bundle. Note, however, that the Order Book does not include the few written questions each day of which no previous notice has been given (see below).

On its first appearance in the Blues each question is assigned a unique number within a parliamentary session. This number appears at the end of the entry in brackets and is a useful reference number when checking on the POLIS (Parliamentary Online Library Indexing Service) database whether a question has been answered.

For further information on Questions see **Factsheet P1**.

Private Business

A list of all private bills to be taken on the current day either in the House of Commons or in

Committee, together with any notices given the previous day about future Private Business.

For further information about Private Legislation see **Factsheets** L4 and L9.

Notices of Motions: Early Day Motions

Another separate section on blue paper and with its own number sequence contains early day motions (EDMs). A Member can table a motion for debate on an unspecified date in the near future, i.e. on an "early day". Since Government business takes priority in the House and the vast majority of EDMs are tabled by backbench MPs, such motions are rarely debated. They appear for the first time in this section of the Vote Bundle on the day after they are tabled. The title of the motion, its number (the sequence starts at the beginning of the parliamentary session), the names of those who have signed it, the text of the motion, the date it was tabled, and the number of signatories are all printed the day after tabling. For two weeks after that, an EDM is only reprinted if further signatures are added; the reprint gives the first six signatories and the names added on the previous sitting day. Thereafter older EDMs are reprinted, provided a name has been added or an amendment tabled, only on Thursdays. Thus Thursday's Notice of Motions is a thicker volume and gives a fuller impression of all EDMs considered still to be "live". There is no printed consolidated list of all the Members who have signed each EDM, but details of EDMs and signatories are accessible through the POLIS database available in the Library and to the public via the Information Office. (This includes names added to older EDMs that have not been reprinted).

Signatures may be added throughout the parliamentary session, unless a motion has been withdrawn or otherwise disposed of. At the end of the session all EDMs fall but can be introduced again in the next session; however, they do not carry over the signatures appended in the previous session.

The vast majority of EDMs are tabled by backbench MPs and have little prospect of being debated. Rare exceptions include motions of no confidence in the Government, which usually appear first as EDMs. The EDM is also the form of motion (a "prayer") used by the Opposition and other Members seeking debate on a statutory instrument subject to the negative procedure. After discussion between the Government and the Opposition, some of these instruments are referred to Standing Committees for debate or, less frequently, debated on the floor of the House.

A complete list of all EDMs tabled thus far in the current session, together with the number of signatures added, is published at the beginning of each recess and at the end of the session.

For further information on EDMs see **Factsheet** P3.

Notices of Amendments

Notices of new amendments tabled for standing committee meetings (and committee of the whole House) on future days are listed on blue sheets. Occasionally marshalled lists of all amendments tabled to date are published in this form, in the order they will be taken in the committee.

Other documents

The **Public Bill list** is published on Saturdays and appears in Monday's full Vote Bundle on white paper. It lists the progress of all public bills presented in the current session. It should be noted that the date for the next stage for private Members' bills can normally be relied upon (although there may not be time for debate on the day stated), but for government bills it is unlikely that

the bill will be taken on the stated day, as it is customary to put all such bills down for the next sitting day. The list also appears on the first day of each recess.

The **European Community Documents list** appears in Monday's full Vote on white paper. It lists all EC documents referred to the two European Standing Committees, and those ordered by the House not to be referred to a committee (so that they can be taken on the floor of the House). The list also shows whether or not each has yet to be considered.

For further information on European legislation see **Factsheet L11**.

The **Regulatory Reform Proposals and Draft Orders** list is published each Wednesday on white paper and gives details of progress on proposals and draft orders currently before the House under the *Regulatory Reform Act 2001*.

For further information on regulatory reform orders see **Factsheet L7**.

The Question Book: also published daily but not included in the Vote Bundle, because it does not relate immediately to the day's business in the House and because the information contained in it has been circulated previously in the Vote Bundle, is the Question Book. The Order Book was revised following the Modernisation Committee report in 1997. It now contains details of written and oral questions only, as described below. It no longer contains information on private Members' bills set down for Fridays, which is now included in the Future Business section.

The Question Book now has two parts:

Part 1: This contains only written questions for the day of its publication of which notice has previously been given in the Notices of Questions section ("the Blues") above. They are arranged in alphabetical order of the answering Department. However, it should be noted that this does not necessarily constitute a complete list of written questions for the day: other written questions to be answered on the day in question for which no previous notice has been given are found in the Order of Business (see above).

Part 2: This contains written and oral questions for answer after today. They are arranged as follows: date for answer; oral before written under each date; date of tabling under each answering date; answering Departments in alphabetical order.

The **Statutory Instruments list** is published on white paper every Monday but does not come as part of the Vote Bundle.

Part 1: contains details of statutory instruments subject to negative procedure for which "praying" time (usually 40 days) has not yet elapsed. The list also provides authoritative information on the number of days remaining.

Part 2: lists statutory instruments subject to the affirmative procedure, which have not yet been approved by the House (together with miscellaneous papers, Church of England measures etc).

Part 3: gives the titles of instruments not subject to any parliamentary procedure, which have been laid since the list was last published.

For further information on statutory instruments see **Factsheet L7**.

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Factsheet P16 The Vote Bundle

It would help greatly to ensure that Factsheets fulfil their purpose if users would fill in and return this brief pre-addressed questionnaire, or email a response. Negative responses can be as useful as positive.

For your purposes, did you find this Factsheet

- | | | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Very useful | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fairly useful | <input type="checkbox"/> | Not much use | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Too long | <input type="checkbox"/> | The right length | <input type="checkbox"/> | Too short | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Clear | <input type="checkbox"/> | Not always clear | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rather unclear | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Any comments?

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