



BRIEFING PAPER

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Leadership elections: Conservative Party

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Inside:

1. The current rules
2. Previous arrangements
3. Leadership contests – current rules
4. The 1922 Committee
5. 2005 proposals to change the leadership election process



Contents

Summary	3
1. The current rules	5
2. Previous arrangements	6
2.1 Pre-1965	6
2.2 New rules in 1965	6
2.3 The change of rules in 1998	7
3. Leadership contests – current rules	9
3.1 2019 Leadership contest	9
3.2 2018 Confidence vote	9
3.3 2016 Leadership contest	9
3.4 2005 Leadership contest	11
3.5 2003 Leadership contest	13
3.6 2001 Leadership contest	14
4. The 1922 Committee	16
5. 2005 proposals to change the leadership election process	17
5.1 Initial proposals for electing a new leader	17
5.2 Revised proposals for electing a new leader	17
5.3 Proposal not backed by the Constitutional College	18
Appendix 1 - Conservative Party Leaders since 1900	20
Appendix 2 - Previous Conservative Party Leadership Elections	21
Appendix 3 - Election rules in Conservative Party Constitution, 2009	22
Appendix 4 - 1922 Committee Chairmen	23

Summary

The Prime Minister, Theresa May, announced her intention to stand down as leader of the Conservative Party on Friday 24 May. She will stand down on Friday 7 June, starting the latest leadership contest of the Conservative Party.

This briefing paper sets out the current rules on Conservative Party leadership elections and the background to their introduction in 1998. It sets out details of the previous elections held under the current rules. It also includes brief details of the pre-1998 rules.

The current system of electing the Leader of the Conservative Party consists of two stages:

- Conservative Members of Parliament select a choice of two candidates to present to the membership of the whole Party;
- Party members vote, on a "one member one vote" basis, for their preferred candidate from a shortlist of two.

The rules for valid nomination of candidates and the process for reducing the field down to the two, should there be more than two candidates, are determined by the Executive of the 1922 Committee in consultation with the Conservative Party Board. In the event of a leadership election the Chairman of the 1922 Committee will announce the procedure to be followed. The broad principles are set out in the Conservative Party Constitution but not the detailed rules.

A leadership contest can be triggered in two ways:

- If 15% of Conservative MPs write to the Chairman of the 1922 Committee saying they no longer have confidence in the leader of the Conservative Party, or
- if the current leader resigns.

A leader losing the confidence of the Parliamentary party is not allowed to participate in the resulting leadership election.

The appendices to the briefing include details of Conservative Party leaders since 1900, election results from 1965-1997, Chairs of the 1922 Committee since 1923, and the broad principles of leadership elections as set out in the Conservative Party Constitution.

Before 1965, leaders of the Conservative Party were not elected, but "emerged" after discussion among Conservative MPs. In 1965, the Party introduced a procedure for the leader to be elected by a ballot of Conservative MPs. Edward Heath was the first leader elected under the 1965 rules.

The current rules for electing the leader of the Conservative Party were introduced in 1998. They were initially set out in principle in the Conservative document, *The Fresh Future*. This document formed the basis for reforms to the organisation of the Conservative Party following its defeat in the 1997 general election.

In 2005, then leader Michael Howard, announced his intention to resign as party leader. He indicated that before he stood down he wanted to oversee changes to the Party's process of electing a new leader. This would have given a role for the Party's National Convention but left the final decision with Conservative MPs. The proposals were not taken up and David Cameron was elected under the existing rules, defeating David Davis in a ballot of the Party's membership.

On 24 June 2016, the day after the UK's referendum on its continued membership of the European Union, David Cameron announced his resignation. He stated that in his view,

the aim should be to have a new Prime Minister in place by the start of the Conservative Party conference in October 2016.

Theresa May was confirmed as leader of the Conservative Party on 13 July 2016 after the a leadership contest. There were initially five candidates but after two ballots of Conservative MPs all but Theresa May had been eliminated or withdrawn and Mrs May was then confirmed as Party leader without the need for a ballot of Party members.

On 12 December 2018, Sir Graham Brady, current Chairman of the 1922 Committee, confirmed that he had received the required number of letters to initiate a vote of no confidence in Theresa May. The ballot was held later that day with the result declared just after 9pm in Committee Room 14. Theresa May won the vote by 200 votes to 117. She cannot now be challenged for 12 months.

1. The current rules

The current rules for electing the leader of the Conservative Party were introduced in 1998. A leadership contest can be triggered in two ways:

- If 15% of Conservative MPs write to the Chairman of the 1922 Committee saying they no longer have confidence in the leader of the Conservative Party, or
- if the current leader resigns.

In brief, the election system consists of two stages:

- Stage 1 - Conservative Members of Parliament select a choice of two candidates to present to the membership of the whole Party.
- Stage 2- Party members vote, on a "one member one vote" basis, for their preferred candidate from a shortlist of two.

The rules and procedures for stage 1 are the responsibility of the 1922 Committee. The 1922 Committee is a committee of backbench Conservative MPs that meets weekly when the Commons is sitting (see section 4). Its chair is elected by Committee members. The current Chair is Sir Graham Brady MP.

The detailed rules for stage 1 are not published and are a matter for the 1922 Committee Executive to agree in consultation with the Conservative Party Board. In the event of a contest the Chairman will announce the procedure and timetable to be followed.

For the 2016 leadership election, an MP needed to be nominated by two colleagues. Candidates validly nominated then went forward to a series of secret first-past-the-post ballots of Conservative MPs. The candidate to finish last in each ballot was to be eliminated until two candidates remained, which would then be put to the Party member vote in Stage 2. However, only one candidate emerged from Stage 1, Theresa May, and she was confirmed as leader of the Party.

The principles of the current procedure, although not the detailed rules, appear as Schedule 2 to the Conservative Party Constitution,¹ reproduced as Appendix 3.

¹ First published Feb 1998; amended Oct 1999; amended July 2002

2. Previous arrangements

2.1 Pre-1965

Before 1965, leaders of the Conservative Party were not elected, but “emerged” after discussion among Conservative MPs, a system which has been described by one academic as “an opaque process of negotiation and ‘soundings’ involving senior party figures”.²

The leadership race that took place at the 1963 Conservative Party Conference following Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s resignation through ill-health proved most controversial.³ Alex Douglas-Home, who emerged as the new leader, was not considered a front runner but Rab Butler and Quentin Hailsham, who were both considered to be contenders, both suffered from poor publicity at the conference. Macmillan therefore recommended to the Queen that Home be invited to form a new administration. This was a process that prompted Ian Macleod’s well-known reference in an article for the *Spectator* in January 1964 to a “magic circle” within the Party.⁴

2.2 New rules in 1965

In 1965, when back in Opposition, Home introduced a procedure for the leader to be elected by a ballot of Conservative MPs.

There was provision for more than one round: if there was no clear winner on the first ballot, the election went on to a second ballot and possibly a third.

To succeed on the first ballot a candidate had to obtain more than 50% of the vote, and also be 15% clear of the second placed candidate.

In a second ballot, a candidate could win with an overall majority of the vote only. If the second ballot failed to produce a winner with more than 50% of the vote, a third ballot was held. Originally the third ballot would be held between the top three candidates using the alternative vote system; this was amended in 1991 to confine the third ballot to the top two candidates.

The procedure was used six times: three times decided on first ballot, twice on second and once on third (see Appendix 2 for details).

Edward Heath was the first leader elected (on one ballot) under the election procedure agreed in 1965. He resisted resignation following the Conservative defeats in both 1974 general elections and the ensuing challenge brought Margaret Thatcher to the leadership in 1975 (after two ballots).

Both Margaret Thatcher (in 1989) and John Major (in 1995) successfully saw off challenges in a leadership contest. Margaret Thatcher defeated

² P Webb, *The Modern British Party System*, 2000, p 197-8

³ For a brief resume of these events, see article by Lord Norton of Louth, “Leadership scramble”, *House Magazine*, 5 Oct 1998, p30

⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Home, Alexander Frederick [Alec] Douglas-, fourteenth earl of Home and Baron Home of the Hirsell, by Douglas Hurd, 23 September 2004

7 Leadership elections: Conservative Party

Sir Anthony Meyer (widely regarded as a “stalking horse” candidate) in 1989. In 1990, she was challenged again, this time by Michael Heseltine. Mrs Thatcher won the first ballot but was not 15% clear of the second placed candidate, as required by the rules. A second ballot was held. She did not contest the second ballot, which was won by John Major.

Major himself precipitated the 1995 leadership election by standing down in order to initiate an election and end speculation over his ability to lead the Party. (This would not now be possible under the new rules: a leader who has resigned cannot stand in the ensuing election.)

Having won that election (on the first ballot), he resigned in 1997 and William Hague became the leader in an election that went to three ballots.

The 1997 leadership election was examined by Keith Alderman who identified several distinctive features of that contest:⁵

- it was the first election under the then procedures in which the incumbent leader had resigned;
- the election went to a third ballot for the first time;
- at seven weeks from announcement of resignation of leader to election of new leader, it was also the longest contest;
- the electorate (i.e. the number of Conservative Members of Parliament) was far smaller than on previous occasions;
- the campaign expenditure by candidates was far higher.

These issues, and other factors following the Conservative Party’s defeat in the 1997 General Election, led to an examination of the leadership election procedures, which ultimately resulted in the new system.

2.3 The change of rules in 1998

The current rules, known as the ‘Hague rules’, were introduced in 1998. They were initially set out in principle in the Conservative document *The Fresh Future*.⁶ This document formed the basis for reforms to the organisation of the Conservative Party following its defeat in the 1997 general election.

In July 1997, the then party leader William Hague gave a speech outlining six principles which underpinned his vision for a new direction for the Party. These principles – unity, decentralisation, democracy, involvement, integrity and openness – fed into the publication of the consultation paper *Blueprint for Change*,⁷ presented to the Party’s conference in October 1997.

Each principle formed a chapter heading in *The Fresh Future* policy paper. The leadership rules were set out in the chapter headed “Democracy: giving power to the members” and formed part of the

⁵ Keith Alderman, “The Conservative Party Leadership Election of 1997”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 51(1), Jan 1998, pp 1-16

⁶ *The Fresh Future: the Conservative Party renewed*, Feb 1998

⁷ *Our Party: blueprint for change – a consultation paper for reform of the Conservative Party*, Oct 1997

strategy to make the Party more accessible and responsive to Party members in the constituencies and to increase Party membership.

At the time of announcing his intention to resign in 2005, Michael Howard announced that the system of electing a Conservative Party leader was to be reviewed and changed (see section 4 below). However, the changes proposed by the review did not secure enough support to be implemented and the 1998 rules were the basis on which the new leader was elected in 2005.

3. Leadership contests – current rules

3.1 2019 Leadership contest

On Friday 24 May 2019, Theresa May announced she would resign as leader of the Conservative Party on 7 June.

A leadership contest will start the following week.

3.2 2018 Confidence vote

On 12 December 2018 Sir Graham Brady confirmed that the required number of letters asking for a no confidence vote in Theresa May had been received. This followed weeks of speculation that the number of letters submitted calling for a no confidence vote was approaching the threshold. At the time the threshold of 15% of the Parliamentary Party was 48 letters.

Sir Graham's statement gave the arrangements for the conduct of the vote:

In accordance with the rules, a ballot will be held between 1800 and 2000 on Wednesday 12th December in committee room 14 of the House of Commons. The votes will be counted immediately afterwards and an announcement will be made as soon as possible in the evening.⁸

According to Sir Graham the threshold had been reached the previous day (Tuesday 11 December). He told reporters that some letters had been withdrawn as well as new letters being submitted:

"It can go down as well as up. But during the course of yesterday we reached a point where it was clear the threshold had been passed – though with an element of traffic in both directions."⁹

The result was announced shortly after 9pm in Committee Room 14 of the House of Commons. Mrs May won by 200 votes to 117.¹⁰

3.3 2016 Leadership contest

On 24 June 2016, the day following the UK's referendum on its continued membership of the European Union, David Cameron announced his resignation. He stated that in his view, the aim should be to have a new Prime Minister in place by the start of the Conservative Party conference in October:

I will do everything I can as Prime Minister to steady the ship over the coming weeks and months, but I do not think it would be right for me to try to be the captain that steers our country to its next destination.

⁸ Reuters, *Statement on vote of confidence in British Prime Minister May*, 12 December 2018

⁹ *Guardian*, *The last-minute pledges and promises that helped May survive leadership challenge*, 12 December 2018

¹⁰ BBC News, *Theresa May survives confidence vote of Tory MPs*, 12 December 2018

This is not a decision I have taken lightly, but I do believe it is in the national interest to have a period of stability and then the new leadership required.

There is no need for a precise timetable today, but in my view we should aim to have a new Prime Minister in place by the start of the Conservative party conference in October.

Delivering stability will be important and I will continue in post as Prime Minister with my Cabinet for the next 3 months.¹¹

The 1922 Committee met on 27 June 2016 and recommended that the election should be completed by 2 September 2016. The following day the Conservative Party Board met and instead proposed the leadership election should be completed by 9 September 2016 to allow for the “full participation of members”.¹² This timetable was agreed by the Board of the full 1922 Committee on 29 June. Nominations opened immediately and closed on Thursday 30 June at midday.¹³

The first vote among MPs will take place on Tuesday 5 July. The candidate with the fewest votes will be eliminated. A further vote was then to be held on Thursday 7 July. If more than two candidates remained in the race voting would take place every Tuesday and Thursday until there were two candidates left.¹⁴

There were five candidates in the first ballot held on Tuesday 5 July.¹⁵

- Stephen Crabb
- Liam Fox
- Michael Gove
- Andrea Leadsom
- Theresa May

Voting took place between 11:00 and 18:00 with the results announced by Graham Brady, the chairman of 1922 Committee.

Theresa May topped the poll with 50% of the votes with Andrea Leadsom the next placed candidate with 20%. Liam Fox was eliminated having polled the fewest votes – 16 (5%).

Later in the evening Stephen Crabb confirmed he too would drop out. It left three candidates to go forward to the next vote on Thursday 7 July.¹⁶ The top two candidates from that ballot were then due to go forward to the ballot of party members.

In the second round of voting, Theresa May again finished top, with 60% of the vote. Andrea Leadsom beat Michael Gove into second place. It meant Leadsom and May were due to go forward to the ballot of the Conservative Party membership.

¹¹ David Cameron, *EU referendum outcome: PM statement, 24 June 2016*

¹² BBC News, *New Tory leader 'should be in place by 9 September'*

¹³ BBC News, *Brexit, Labour and Tory Leadership: rolling news*, 29 June 2016

¹⁴ BBC News, *“Tory Leadership: Runners and Riders”*, 30 June 2016

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ BBC News, *“Tory leadership: Theresa May tops first vote but Liam Fox out”*, 5 July 2016

2016 Leadership contest: Result of ballot of Members of Parliament

First ballot (Tuesday 5 July)

Theresa May	165 votes
Andrea Leadsom	66 votes
Michael Gove	48 votes
Stephen Crabb	34 votes
Liam Fox	16 votes

Second ballot (Thursday 7 July)

Theresa May	199 votes
Andrea Leadsom	84 votes
Michael Gove	46 votes

The leadership ballot of the party membership was due to last about nine weeks with the result to be announced on 9 September 2016. However, on Monday 11 July Andrea Leadsom announced she was withdrawing her candidacy. In a statement she said:

A nine-week leadership campaign at such a critical moment for our country is highly undesirable.

For me personally, to have won the support of 84 of my colleagues last Thursday was a great expression of confidence for which I am incredibly grateful.

Nevertheless, this is less than 25% of the parliamentary party and after careful consideration I do not believe this is sufficient support to lead a strong and stable government should I win the leadership election.¹⁷

The chairman of the 1922 Committee, Graham Brady, said Mrs May would be formally confirmed as the new party leader as soon as the Conservative Party board had been consulted - saying there would be "no need to re-run the election".¹⁸

Later in the afternoon the Prime Minister, David Cameron, confirmed that he would resign as Prime Minister on Wednesday 13 July, with his last audience with the Queen at 17:00.

3.4 2005 Leadership contest

Nominations for candidates officially opened on 7 October 2005, the day on which Michael Howard formally resigned.¹⁹ When they closed at noon on 13 October, it was confirmed that four candidates were standing for the leadership:²⁰

- Kenneth Clarke²¹

¹⁷ ConservativeHome, *Leadsom's statement*, 11 July 2016.

¹⁸ BBC News, *Theresa May set to be UK PM after Andrea Leadsom quits*, 11 July

¹⁹ BBC News, *"Tories nominate as Howard Resigns"*, 7 October 2005

²⁰ Conservative Party, *Leadership Election Timetable*, 13 October 2005

²¹ Candidacy announced 30 August 2005. "Clarke's decision to stand for Tory leadership aimed at besting rivals", *Financial Times*, 31 August 2005, p2

- Liam Fox²²
- David Davis²³
- David Cameron²⁴

A fifth candidate, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, who had declared that he would stand on 29 August 2005,²⁵ pulled out on 11 October 2005.²⁶

In accordance with Conservative Party rules, the first ballot was held on 18 October 2005. The results were as follows:

2005 Leadership contest: Result of ballot of Members of Parliament

First ballot (Tuesday 18 October)

David Davis	62 votes
David Cameron	56 votes
Liam Fox	42 votes
Kenneth Clarke	38 votes

Second ballot (Thursday 20 October)

David Cameron	90 votes
David Davis	57 votes
Liam Fox	51 votes

Members of the Conservative Party were therefore asked to choose between David Cameron and David Davis in a postal ballot, which closed on 5 December 2005.²⁷ The Conservative Party Board announced that the final results of the contest would be announced on 6 December 2005.²⁸

The ballot forms were sent out at the beginning of November.²⁹ During the voting period, eleven regional hustings meetings were held. The first hustings took place in Leicester on 14 November 2005, and the last took place in Exeter on 30 November 2005.³⁰

On 6 December 2005, the result of the ballot was announced by Sir Michael Spicer, then Chairman of the 1922 Committee.³¹ The result was:

²² Candidacy announced 8 September 2005. "Fox begins bid to lead Tories with Union flag policy for all schools", *Evening Standard*, 8 September 2005, p8

²³ Candidacy announced 29 September 2005

²⁴ Candidacy announced 29 September 2005 "The two David's come out fighting", *Daily Telegraph*, 30 September 2005, p4

²⁵ "Rifkind is 'one nation' candidate", *Daily Telegraph*, 30 August 2005, p6

²⁶ George Jones, Brendan Carlin and Jonathan Isaby, "Then there were four as Rifkind quits Tory race", *Daily Telegraph*, 12 October 2005

²⁷ Conservative Party, "Leadership Election Update", 20 October 2005

²⁸ Conservative Party, "Statement from the Conservative Party Board", 29 September 2005

²⁹ George Jones, "Cameron gets vital 100 MPs as Fox supporters switch to join his side", *Daily Telegraph*, 31 October 2005

³⁰ Brendan Carlin, "We go to the wire, says defiant Davis", *Daily Telegraph*, 15 November 2005

³¹ Conservative Party, *David Cameron elected new Conservative Leader*, 6 December 2005

2005 Leadership Election: Result of ballot of party members

	Votes	%
David Cameron	134,446	68%
David Davis	64,398	32%
Eligible voters	253,689	
Turnout	198,844	78%

3.5 2003 Leadership contest

On 28 October 2003, Sir Michael Spicer, then chairman of the 1922 Committee, announced that he had received 25 letters from Conservative Members of Parliament requesting a vote of confidence in the leadership.³² He subsequently announced that the vote of confidence would take place on 29 October 2003.

The motion before the Conservative Members of Parliament was:

I have confidence in Iain Duncan Smith as leader of the Conservative Party

Sir Michael gave the result: 75 had voted yes and 90 had voted no. He also announced that nominations for the post of leader had to be submitted by noon on Thursday 6 November.³³

When nominations closed, only one had been received, and accordingly Michael Howard was declared elected.³⁴ Before his election was confirmed, he 'promised to submit his likely "coronation" victory to ratification by the wider party membership',³⁵ because of the 'wrath of the constituencies which remain resentful at the way Duncan Smith was removed from power'.³⁶ However, it was subsequently reported that:

The speed of the bloodless coup was underlined when the party's board announced his leadership would not be subject to a formal ratification ballot of the membership. Following "overwhelming representations" from members, "informal consultation" with activists will instead be carried out over the weekend.³⁷

Speculation on the calling of a vote of confidence had lasted for a considerable time. Once the vote of confidence was announced, Iain Duncan Smith stressed the support he had among the Conservative Party's wider membership:

I know I have the confidence of the grass roots – and I look forward to their original election of me, and their continued

³² 25 MPs equated to 15 per cent of the 165 Conservative MPs

³³ "Exit the Quiet Man, quietly. Now the stage is set for Howard", *The Independent*, 30 October 2003, p1

³⁴ Conservative Party, "Michael Howard takes over as leader"

³⁵ 'Howard: defeat changed me', *The Guardian*, 4 November 2003, p12

³⁶ 'Michael Howard may turn out to be the Tory leader who lays Thatcher's ghost', John Gray, *New Statesman*, 10 November 2003, pp29-31

³⁷ 'New leader takes charge with hint of Portillo role', *The Independent*, 7 November 2003, p8

support, being validated by my parliamentary colleagues. Then we can begin the campaign to win the next election.³⁸

3.6 2001 Leadership contest

William Hague announced his resignation as Leader of the Conservative Party on 8 June 2001, following the Conservative Party's defeat in the General Election.

Following his election as Chairman of the 1922 Committee on 27 June 2001, Sir Michael Spicer announced that the closing date for nominations for the leadership would be Thursday 5 July.³⁹ Five Members stood for the leadership in the ensuing election contest:

- Michael Portillo⁴⁰
- Iain Duncan Smith⁴¹
- David Davis⁴²
- Michael Ancram⁴³
- Kenneth Clarke⁴⁴

There then followed a series of ballots in the Parliamentary Party. The rules state that the candidate in last place would drop out each time. However, in the first ballot two candidates tied for last place (which was not explicitly provided for in the rules⁴⁵) and so all five went forward to a second ballot.

The results were as follows:

2001 Leadership contest: Result of ballot of Members of Parliament

First ballot (Tuesday 10 July)

Michael Portillo	49 votes
Iain Duncan Smith	39 votes
Kenneth Clarke	36 votes
Michael Ancram	21 votes
David Davis	21 votes

Second ballot (Thursday 12 July)

Michael Portillo	50 votes
Iain Duncan Smith	42 votes
Kenneth Clarke	39 votes
David Davis	18 votes
Michael Ancram	17 votes

³⁸ "I have the confidence of the grass roots", *The Independent*, 29 October 2003, p4

³⁹ Taken as the date of call for nominations

⁴⁰ Candidacy announced 13 June 2001, [BBC News Online](#)

⁴¹ Candidacy announced 19 June 2001

⁴² Candidacy announced 19 June 2001

⁴³ Candidacy announced 21 June 2001

⁴⁴ Candidacy announced 26 June 2001

⁴⁵ Rule 26 now makes provision for this event. In the first instance, the ballot is re-run. If there is again a tie among candidates with the least votes, those candidates are eliminated. However, if only three candidates are involved in the ballot, the ballot is re-run until only one candidate has the least number of votes (Rule 34).

15 Leadership elections: Conservative Party

Michael Ancram therefore did not go forward to the next round. David Davis subsequently withdrew.

Third ballot (Tuesday 17 July)

Kenneth Clarke	59 votes
Iain Duncan Smith	54 votes
Michael Portillo	53 votes

A postal ballot of Conservative Party members⁴⁶ was held over the summer. The Conservative Party website indicated that ballot papers were sent out in mid-August, and had to be returned by 11 September.⁴⁷ Due to events in the United States on Tuesday 11 September, the result was delayed twenty four hours and was announced on 13 September, by Sir Michael Spicer, then Chairman of the 1922 Committee.⁴⁸

2001 Leadership Election: Result of ballot of party members

	Votes	%
Iain Duncan Smith	155,933	61%
Kenneth Clarke	100,864	39%
Eligible voters	328,000	
Turnout	256,797	78%

⁴⁶ Those who have been members for at least 3 months at the date of the call for nominations (27 June)

⁴⁷ According to press reports there were queries from about 3,000 members about missing ballot papers *Times* 14 September 2001 'Tory rivals welcome 'fantastic poll return'

⁴⁸ BBC News, "[Duncan Smith elected Tory Leader](#)", 13 September 2001

4. The 1922 Committee

The 1922 Committee has traditionally been responsible for the organisation of the ballot for leader.

The Committee is chaired by a senior backbencher, who enjoys access to the party leader and keeps the leadership informed of backbench opinion. Other office-holders are elected annually to form, with the Chairman, an Executive Committee. The Committee acts as a “sounding board” of opinion among Conservative Members.

From its inception until 2010, the 1922 Committee had comprised all Conservative private Members of Parliament. When in Government, that meant the entire backbench membership of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons; when in Opposition, it meant all Conservative Members bar the Leader.

On 20 May 2010 Prime Minister David Cameron won a vote among Conservative MPs by 168 to 118 to reform the committee. The reform was to allow ministers, government whips and the Prime Minister to attend meetings. Frontbench members, however, do not get to vote.⁴⁹

It is sometimes thought that the Committee is so called after the famous meeting of Conservative Members at the Carlton Club in October 1922 which led to the ending of the 1916-1922 Coalition Government and the departure of Austen Chamberlain as leader. In fact, Philip Goodhart’s history of the 1922 Committee states that the Committee was actually set up in April 1923 following an initiative by new Conservative Members elected at the 1922 General Election to facilitate cooperation within the party and assistance in integrating new Members.⁵⁰

The position of 1922 Chairman was vacant at the start of the 2001 Parliament, following the retirement as an MP of Sir Archibald Hamilton at the General Election. The leadership election could not therefore take place until the 1922 Committee had elected a new Chairman. This took place on 27 June 2001 and Sir Michael Spicer, the former Environment Minister, was elected as the new Chairman.⁵¹ Graham Brady, former Shadow Minister for Europe and Shadow Minister for Education, was elected Chairman on 26 May 2010, after Sir Michael stood down as an MP.

⁴⁹ New Statesman, [The 1922 Committee](#), 11 October 2017

⁵⁰ *The 1922: the story of the Conservative Backbenchers’ Parliamentary Committee*, 1973, pp 14-5

⁵¹ The results of the election: Sir Michael Spicer – 79 votes; Gillian Shephard – 66 votes; John Butterfill – 11 votes. For further details see [BBC Online](#)

5. 2005 proposals to change the leadership election process

5.1 Initial proposals for electing a new leader

Following the Conservative Party's defeat at the 2005 general election, Michael Howard announced his intention to retire as leader of the Conservative Party in a speech on 6 May 2005. However, he indicated that before he stood down he wanted to oversee changes to the Party's process of electing a new leader.⁵² These new proposals were set out in principle in the Conservative Party document *A 21st Century Party*.

- 1 To be validly nominated, candidates would require the support of 10 per cent of Conservative MPs.
- 2 If one Candidate is nominated by over half of the Parliamentary Party, he or she would automatically be declared leader.
- 3 If no candidate is nominated by over half of the Parliamentary Party, each candidate would address and answer questions from the National Convention. The Convention would then vote and the result of this election would be published.
- 4 The MPs would then make the final choice. It would be for the 1922 Committee to determine how they do this but the candidate who received most votes from the National Convention would be guaranteed a place in each ballot including the final ballot.
- 5 Candidates would be allowed to spend up to £25,000 from the opening of nominations. The Party Treasurer would be responsible for raising this money for each candidate. Any money raised from other sources would be deducted from the money they receive from the Party Treasurer.⁵³

This proposal was put to the 1922 Committee on 15 May 2005, but rejected. About 100 of the 180 backbenchers that attended the meeting instead endorsed a motion drawn up by the executive of the committee. The 1922 Committee proposal included a consultative period with all local associations, but the choice of leader would ultimately be decided by the parliamentary party.⁵⁴

5.2 Revised proposals for electing a new leader

Under the 1922 Committee proposed system, Sir Michael Spicer, then Chairman of the 1922 Committee of MPs, would seek nominations for leader from Conservative Members of Parliament. Contenders would need the support of 5% of the party, or 10 MPs (in the current Parliament), in order to stand.

⁵² "Full Text: Michael Howard's Resignation Speech", *Guardian*, 6 May 2005.

⁵³ *The Fresh Future: A consultation paper setting out proposals to reform the Conservative party's organisation*, 25 May 2005.

⁵⁴ "Tory backbenchers rebuff Howard's blueprint for rules reform", *Financial Times*, 16 May 2005, p2.

Once nominations had closed MPs would then start a two week consultation process with their constituencies, MEPs and local councillors to ascertain their preferred candidates. They would then report back to Sir Michael, who would assess their findings and inform MPs of the two candidates who gained most support, in order of preference.

MPs would then hold the first ballot, in which all nominated candidates would be able to participate. As in the current system the MP with the lowest number of votes would be eliminated. The process would then be repeated, as required, until one candidate remained.⁵⁵

Andrew Tyrie, the Conservative MP for Chichester hailed the decision by the parliamentary party to accept the new proposals, by 127 votes to 50 on 20 July 2005 at a meeting of the 1922 committee, as a “victory for common sense”.⁵⁶

The 1922 Committee proposal was then put to the Conservative Party Board which duly supported it. Following this result Party Chairman, Francis Maude commented;

I am pleased that these changes, agreed by the Party Board and the 1922 Committee, are going to be put forward. If these changes go through, the Conservative Party will have a new Leader in place by the middle of November.⁵⁷

However, other MPs were less enthusiastic about the new system. In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* a number of MPs including David Willetts, Michael Ancram, Andrew Lansley, Theresa May and Iain Duncan Smith, wrote:

It is not too late for the parliamentary party to find a way of involving grassroots members in the Conservative Party’s most important decisions. Any proposals that do not facilitate democratic involvement deserve to be defeated.⁵⁸

5.3 Proposal not backed by the Constitutional College

When the results of the ballot of the Constitutional College⁵⁹ of the Conservative Party were announced on 27 September 2005, the proposals had failed to gain enough backing. A total of 1,001 (87.7% of full membership) ballots were returned, the votes in each section were:

⁵⁵ “Rule change puts the choice of Tory leader into hands of MPs”, *The Times*, 21 July 2005, p8

⁵⁶ “Tory MPs wrest back the power to choose leader”, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 July 2005, p2.

⁵⁷ Conservative Party, “Conservative Party Board decides on leadership postal vote”, 5 August 2005

⁵⁸ “Grassroots involvement”, *Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 2005, p23.

⁵⁹ Constitutional college had a total of 1,141 members and is made up of MPs, MEPs, the officers of the Association of Conservative Peers, frontbench spokesmen in the Lords, and members of The National Conservative Convention (Association Chairmen, area and regional officers, members of the Board and other senior volunteers).

Results of the Constitutional College Ballot

	For		Against	
MPs	132	71.4%	53	28.6%
Volunteers*	446	58.5%	317	41.5%
Peers and MEPs	33	63.5%	19	36.5%

This equated to a total of 61 per cent of the constitutional college in favour. For the changes to be approved, 50 per cent of all those eligible to vote were required to vote in favour, along with 66 per cent of MPs who voted and 66 per cent of the National Convention members who voted, it is this final threshold that was not reached.⁶⁰

As a result of the Constitutional College ballot, no changes were made to the party's rules on electing a leader.

⁶⁰ Conservative Party, "Way now clear for leadership election", 27 September 2005

Appendix 1 - Conservative Party Leaders since 1900⁶¹

April 1881	M of Salisbury
14 July 1902	Arthur Balfour
13 November 1911	Andrew Bonar Law
21 March 1921	Austen Chamberlain
23 October 1922	Andrew Bonar Law
28 May 1923	Stanley Baldwin
31 May 1937	Neville Chamberlain
09 October 1940	(Sir) Winston Churchill
21 April 1955	Sir Anthony Eden
22 January 1957	Harold Macmillan
11 November 1963	Sir Alec Douglas-Home
02 August 1965	Edward Heath
11 February 1975	Margaret Thatcher
28 November 1990	John Major
19 June 1997	William Hague
13 September 2001	Iain Duncan Smith
06 November 2003	Michael Howard
06 December 2005	David Cameron
13 July 2016	Theresa May

Notes:

Marquess of Salisbury was joint leader of the party with Sir Stafford Northcote from 1881-1885. Northcote was leader in the House of Commons until 1885. Salisbury was Prime Minister 1885-95 and 1895-1902. Arthur Balfour was leader of the Conservative party in the Commons 1891-1902.⁶²

Bonar Law (1911-21) and Austen Chamberlain (1921-22) were Leaders of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons. Formerly when the Party was in Opposition there were separate Leaders in the Commons and the Lords and the title "Leader of the Conservative and Unionist Party" did not officially exist. It was conferred in October 1922 on Bonar Law when he was elected for his second term of office.

Neville Chamberlain remained the Leader of the Conservative Party until 4 October 1940, although he was succeeded as Prime Minister by Winston Churchill on 10 May 1940 and resigned from the Government on 30 September 1940.

⁶¹ Butler & Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts 1900-2000*, 2000, p 135

⁶² Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Robert Gascoyne Cecil - 3rd M of Salisbury and Arthur James Balfour

Appendix 2 - Previous Conservative Party Leadership Elections⁶³

Conservative Party Leadership ballots 1965-1997

1965 1st ballot			2nd ballot			3rd ballot		
28 July 1965	E Heath[1]	150						
	R Maudling	133						
	E Powell	15						
1975 1st ballot			2nd Ballot					
04 February 1975	M Thatcher	130	11 February 1975	M Thatcher	140			
	E Heath	119		W Whitelaw	79			
	H Fraser	16		Sir G Howe	19			
				J Prior	19			
				J Peyton	11			
1989 1st Ballot[2]								
05 December 1989	M Thatcher	314						
	Sir A Meyer	33						
1990 1st Ballot			2nd Ballot					
20 November 1990	M Thatcher	204	27 November 1990	J Major	185[3]			
	M Heseltine	152		M Heseltine	131			
				D Hurd	56			
1995 1st Ballot [4]								
04 July 1995	J Major	218						
	J Redwood	89						
1997 1st Ballot			2nd Ballot			3rd Ballot		
10 June 1997	K Clarke	49	17 June 1997	K Clarke	64	19 June 1997	W Hague	92
	W Hague	41		W Hague	62		K Clarke	70
	J Redwood	27		J Redwood	38			
	P Lilley	24						
	M Howard	23						

[1] Although the rules required a larger majority, R. Maudling immediately withdrew in favour of E. Heath

[2] There were 27 abstentions

[3] Although the rules required a larger majority, both M. Heseltine and D. Hurd withdrew in favour of J. Major when the results of the second ballot were known

[4] There were 22 abstentions

Appendix 3 - Election rules in Conservative Party Constitution, 2009

SCHEDULE 2 RULES FOR THE ELECTION OF THE LEADER

1 The Leader shall be elected by the Party Members and Scottish Party Members.

2 A Leader resigning from the Leadership of the Party is not eligible for re-nomination in the consequent Leadership election.

Election of Leader

3 Upon the initiation of an election for the Leader, it shall be the duty of the 1922 Committee to present to the Party, as soon as reasonably practicable, a choice of candidates for election as Leader. The rules for deciding the procedure by which the 1922 Committee selects candidates for submission for election shall be determined by the Executive Committee of the 1922 Committee after consultation of the Board.

4 If there is only one candidate at the time laid down for the close of nominations, that candidate shall be declared Leader of the Party.

5 Only those Party Members and Scottish Party Members who were members of the Party from the time of the call for nominations by the Chairman of the 1922 Committee for the election of the Leader and have been members for at least three months immediately prior to the close of the ballot for the election of the Leader shall be entitled to vote.

6 A candidate achieving more than 50% of the vote among the Party Membership shall be declared elected Leader of the Party.

7 In the event of there being only one valid nomination at the close of nominations prior to the first ballot being held by the Parliamentary Party for the election of the new Leader, the election of the nominee may if so ordered by the Board be ratified by a ballot of the Party Members and Scottish Party Members to be held within one month of the close of nomination.

8 Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the rules for the conduct of the ballot or ballots of Party Members and Scottish Party Members shall be agreed by the Board and the Executive Committee of the 1922 Committee.

9 The Chairman of the 1922 Committee, acting on behalf of the Party, shall act as Returning Officer for all stages of the election.

Appendix 4 - 1922 Committee Chairmen⁶⁴

Jan 1923 – Nov 1932	(Sir) G Rentoul
Dec 1932 - Dec 1935	W Morrison
Dec 1935 – Jul 1939	Sir H O'Neill
Sep 1939 – Nov 1939	Sir A Somerville
Dec 1939 – Dec 1940	W Spens
Dec 1940 – Dec 1944	A Erskine Hill
Dec 1944 – Jun 1945	J McEwen
Aug 1945 – Nov 1951	Sir A Gridley
Nov 1951 – Nov 1955	D Walker-Smith
Nov 1955 - Nov 1964	J Morrison
Nov 1964 – Mar 1966	Sir W Andstruther-Gray
May 1966 – Jul 1970	Sir A Harvey
Jul 1970 – Nov 1972	Sir H Legge-Bourke
Nov 1972 – Nov 1984	E du Cann
Nov 1984 – Apr 1992	C Onslow
Apr 1992 – May 1997	Sir M Fox
May 1997 – May 2001	Sir A Hamilton
June 2001 – May 2010	Sir M Spicer
May 2010 – present	(Sir) G Brady

⁶⁴ Butler & Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts 1900-2000*, 2000, p 139

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