



# Parliament & You

Notes from a public meeting held for the  
constituents of Ogmore on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 2007

Foreword by  
Madeleine Moon MP and Huw Irranca-Davies MP

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## Foreword by Your local MPs

I am delighted to be presenting these notes of a public meeting I held, together with Ogmere MP Huw Irranca-Davies MP, in Aberkenfig earlier this summer. This was the second and concluding part to a summer discussion on the issue of how to modernise parliament, with the previous meeting focusing on reform of the House of Commons.

Lords reform has provoked debate and policy initiatives for more than 100 years. The government's reforms of 1999, which saw the removal of the majority of hereditary peers, were the most significant reforms of the House of Lords for decades.

In the government's 2005 manifesto we pledged to further reform the House of Lords to make it "effective, legitimate and more representative without challenging the primacy of the House of Commons".

However It isn't supposed to be about us telling you what we think. It is meant to be a two way discussion, and to do that properly, we need to hear your views, discuss them with you, and take the details of that discussion back to Parliament.

I hope you find these notes interesting, and if you read something here that you agree or disagree with, something that makes you happy or angry or anywhere in between then I'm glad – because the whole purpose of these meetings is to encourage you to get involved with the process. If you weren't able to attend don't worry, we fully intend to continue holding such discussion forums for as long as we are your MPs.

Best wishes

Madeleine Moon MP & Huw Irranca-Davies MP

# Parliament & You

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## 1. Is there is a need for a second chamber?

*The meeting considered who should the over-riding issue of whether we need a second chamber at all, and if so why?*

There was unanimous support of a need for a second chamber, however there was a lively debate about what role this chamber should perform, these included:

- ❖ The ability to call in and or overturn decisions made in the House of Commons
- ❖ Provide independent scrutiny on legislation, as insufficient time is found in the Commons for full detailed analysis.
- ❖ Greater involvement in policy formation
- ❖ A revising chamber in place to prevent dictatorial governance

It was agreed by all, including the representative MP's and Baroness present that there is an insufficient knowledge of what the House of Lords does. It was felt that the workings of the second chamber do need to be explained, and that the debate in the country on the issue of reform of the House of Lords should go a long way to hopefully achieving that aim and therefore creating greater public involvement.

The debate on this issue was pretty conclusive, with a near unanimous support for a strengthened scrutinising, revising second chamber, in place to hold the government in check.

After much discussion and helpful explanation from the speakers, especially Baroness Gale it was agreed unanimously that the second chamber should continue with its current functions:

- ❖ Consideration and amendment of legislation
- ❖ Holding the Government to account through debates and questions
- ❖ Scrutiny of UK Government and EU proposals
- ❖ Consideration of constitutional and human rights matters
- ❖ Holding Committees to conduct scrutiny and inquiries

## 2. How should a second chamber be composed?

*As it was agreed that there was a need for a second chamber, the meeting consequently discussed how this chamber should be composed, elected, appointed? How elected? Government Majority?*

This issue was more divisive with many different views expressed:

- ❖ There was mixed opinion on the make up of a new second chamber, however the clearly favoured option was for a split of elected and appointed members.
- ❖ There were calls for the second chamber to be made less political and for there to be more citizenship involvement, including increased representation on equality issues, geographical issues and disability issues.
- ❖ The discussion concluded that no one party should have an overall majority in the second chamber.
- ❖ It was perhaps surprisingly agreed that the Prime Minister should still be able to appoint individuals to sit as Government Ministers in the second chamber.

These outcomes of the meeting fitted with the government's own White Paper which stated that "an all appointed House fails to meet a crucial principle in a reformed second chamber – that of legitimacy".

As with the White paper the majority of those in attendance concluded that, "the obvious alternative would seem to be a hybrid of the two". With a high proportion of elected members, and with a smaller percentage of appointed members, possibly in the region of 80%-20%.

On the issue of how members would be elected to the chamber there was again a lengthy and detailed debate:

- ❖ It was agreed nearly unanimously that there should be some form of restrictions on the term of office in the second chamber
- ❖ There was a large support for members to be elected on a regional basis, possibly in cycles of 1/3rds. However there was also a small support for direct elections.
- ❖ Unsurprisingly it was largely agreed that there should not be a link between the second chamber and the peerage.

### **3. Religious representation?**

*Should the second chamber continue to have religious representation?  
Should other religions other than the COE also be represented?*

As expected this was a contentious issue:

- ❖ Although the issue of religious representation brought differing opinions, there was a majority with a leaning towards the continuation of religious representation in the second chamber.
- ❖ However with an increase in representation from other religions (non COE/CIW).

It was noted that at present there are 26 Church of England Bishops in the House of Lords, thus making up only a small percentage of the total number of members.

It was suggested that as the 2001 census indicates that a majority of the UK population classify themselves as Christian that religious representation should continue:

However as there is a growing percentage of people with strong beliefs in other religions it was felt unjust that these people's religious beliefs were not represented in the second chamber.

#### 4. The modernisation of Parliament

*Do we need to modernise? Is it right that our parliamentary system still contains hereditary peers? Are the state occasions worth while? Should the chamber still be named the House of Lords?*

The vast majority of those attending the event agreed with the removal of all hereditary peers. It was noted that although it is often claimed that the hereditary peers provide an apolitical view point without and party political bias, this is not the case, as the conservative party relies disproportionately on sitting hereditary peers – about 85% of hereditary peers vote with the conservative party.

There was a strong feeling amongst those present that reform is much needed to up date parliament's second chamber. It was strongly felt that there is a need for a second chamber that has far greater accountability and transparency as well as a far more defined and well understood role.

The most commonly used was: that the second chamber should be more representative. There was a strong feeling that the current members of the second chamber do not represent them, whether that be due to lack of representation of the regions, or of other distinct population groups.

On the more imaginative issue of naming the new second chamber, there were many suggestions:

- ❖ Second Chamber
- ❖ Citizen's House
- ❖ Senate
- ❖ People's House
- ❖ And even continuing with House of Lords

It was interesting to note that although it was unanimously agreed that further reform is needed, it was also accepted that there has been and still is a huge debate about how to proceed, and how far to go.

Bridgend's MP, Madeleine has helped constituents in thousands of separate cases, if you need her help, support or advice; or simply wish to raise a concern, get in touch in following ways.

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**These notes will be delivered personally by Madeleine to the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to ensure that the views of the Bridgend & Ogmore residents are heard at the highest level.**



If you would like to attend future meetings, please email your contact details to [moonm@parliament.uk](mailto:moonm@parliament.uk)

For further information on Madeleine & Huw and Madeleine visit their websites:

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