

The prospects for Lords Reform

The case for optimism

More than a decade of cross-party work:

- Wakeham Royal Commission, 2000
- Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform, 2002
- *Breaking the Deadlock* group, 2005
- Cross-party talks leading to Labour Government White Paper, 2008
- Further cross-party talks, leading to Coalition Draft Bill, 2010

Draft Bill reflects the consensus arrived at among the parties for:

- Elections in thirds, by proportional representation, so the second chamber is clearly distinct from the Commons and never has a more recent mandate
- Single, long, non-renewable terms so that Members of the Second Chamber retain a long-term perspective, and independence from party whips
- Governments to rely on Commons only for confidence
- Parliament Acts to remain in place, as a longstop reinforcing primacy of the House of Commons

Clear need for reform

- The Lords is unwilling to resist the Government, precisely because it is not elected. Of the 1,366 amendments carried since the General Election, only 74 (5%) passed without the sanction of the Government.
- Parliament as a whole would be strengthened by a democratic second chamber, willing more often to resist the heavily-whipped Executive majority in the Commons
- The existing Lords is kept going primarily by former politicians, not experts
- Divisions in the Lords tend to be decided not on the merit of an issue but by the timing of a vote, since independent cross benchers (the ‘swing’ vote) go home in the evenings

Clear commitment to reform

- Labour has committed to Lords reform in previous four manifestos
- Liberal Democrats and Liberals committed for decades
- Conservatives committed since 2001
- Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister “fully committed to holding the first elections to the reformed House of Lords in 2015”

Issues under examination in the Joint Committee

- How to foreshadow necessary re-examination of the conventions governing the relationship between the two Houses when the composition has changed
- The electoral system to use – weighing advantages of STV and Open Lists
- The likely size of the reformed House
- Whether or not Bishops / other faith representation should remain