

# Constitution Unit

## Monitor 85 / November 2023



### Positioning for the next election

Rishi Sunak marked his first anniversary as Prime Minister on 25 October. The legacy of his predecessors continued to dog him over the summer. Boris Johnson's resignation from parliament in June – covered in [the last issue of Monitor](#) – triggered a by-election in his constituency of Uxbridge and South Ruislip. The Conservative Party hung on there, but lost four other by-elections in safe seats, three of which were called for reasons related to his departure (see page 6). Meanwhile, the Covid-19 inquiry revealed what many saw as chaos at the heart of government.

Sunak sought to reset his image in September, as a Prime Minister focused on making the right long-term decisions. He acknowledged that 'people in our country are frustrated with our politics', saying, 'I know that they dislike Westminster game playing, the short termism, and the lack of accountability'. He pledged 'a wholly new kind of politics' with 'space for a better, more honest debate about how we secure the country's long-term interest'. [Announcing a shift in net zero policy](#), he added, 'in a democracy, we must also be able to scrutinise and debate those changes'.

These were virtuous sentiments, chiming strongly with much of what defenders of core democratic and

[Keir Starmer presents new MPs to Labour Party colleagues \(CC BY-NC-ND 2.0\)](#) by [keir.starmer.mp](#).

constitutional principles have been pressing for in recent years. But aspects of the speech appeared to undermine them. Some dropped policies had never actually existed. Sunak's call for accountability and scrutiny was delivered on the first day of a parliamentary recess, leaving MPs unable to question him on his plans for almost a month. The Commons Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, responded with a sharply worded rebuke (see page 3).

This was not the government's only recent indication of unwillingness to accept scrutiny. Ministers responded in July – on the day the Commons rose for its summer break – to three reports on strengthening the system for upholding standards in public office, rejecting many of their recommendations. These included a key proposal from the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee to place three ethical watchdogs on a statutory footing (see page 7).

Meanwhile, some ministers chafed against the constraints of international law. Home Secretary Suella Braverman [repeated](#) her personal view that the UK should leave the European Convention on Human Rights. In her speech to the Conservative Party conference in October, amidst a tirade against the 'privileged woke minority' that left many moderate Conservatives alarmed, she labelled the Human Rights Act 'the Criminal Rights Act'. Sunak's call for reasoned policy debate was further challenged when Transport Secretary Mark Harper [advanced debunked conspiracy theories](#).

#### In this edition

[Parliament 2–5](#)

[Elections, referendums and democratic engagement 6–7](#)

[Executive 7–9](#)

[Nations and regions 9–12](#)

[Public attitudes to the constitution 12](#)

[International 12–13](#)

[People on the move 13–14](#)

[Constitution Unit news 14–15](#)

[Bulletin Board 16–17](#)



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The Constitution Unit



The [King's Speech](#) on 7 November – the first for both the King and his Prime Minister – was a further opportunity for Sunak to set out his stall to voters. There was a heavy focus on criminal justice, including a planned Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Bill that will have implications for privacy rights and the judicial oversight of intelligence agencies. Other proposals with potential constitutional implications included changes to data protection rules and a Media Bill that would revise rules on public service broadcasting and remove press regulation provisions that were enacted after the 2012 Leveson Report, but never implemented.

With opinion polls leading most Westminster observers to expect a change of government following the next general election, attention has increasingly turned to the Labour Party. Keir Starmer reshuffled his frontbench team in September (see page 13), with the constitutional briefs subject to significant change. Angela Rayner will now spearhead Labour's plans for devolution within England, while Nick Thomas-Symonds will coordinate constitutional policy, and Florence Eshalomi will focus on democracy.

At Labour's conference in October, Starmer echoed Sunak in [calling](#) for 'an entirely new approach to politics' focused on long-term policymaking. He emphasised a need for respect and service in politics. Besides a brief pledge to fight for the rule of law, however, he did not indicate whether that would involve changing political processes as well as policies. The conference was overshadowed by the Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel on 7 October. Tense debates subsequently emerged within the party over the Israeli government's response.

Back at Westminster, there are growing calls for action on Lord appointments – and the likely new chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission, Baroness (Ruth) Deech, indicated support for expanding the commission's remit if ministers allowed (see page 4). A Speaker's Conference published proposals for limited reform of the employment conditions of MPs' staff – a group that has been subject to only very limited previous study, but is the focus of the Unit's [latest report](#), published in October (see page 14). The government announced plans to raise spending limits during election campaigns (see page 6). And proposals were made for civil service reform (see page 8).

Outside London, the SNP's woes continue (see page 11). The party lost the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election in early October. Two of its senior elected representatives then defected over the following

weeks: Lisa Cameron MP to the Conservatives, and Ash Regan MSP to Alex Salmond's Alba Party. The SNP's annual conference agreed a revised path towards seeking Scottish independence. Meanwhile, the Welsh government published a bill setting out its plans to expand the Senedd and reform its voting system. Further legislation, on gender quotas, is expected soon (see page 12).

In Northern Ireland, ongoing talks between UK ministers and the leaders of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) have so far failed to break the deadlock over restoring the Assembly and Executive (see page 10). DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson praised devolved government at his party's conference and hinted at a desire to find a way forward. But expectations of change in the short term are low. A [report](#) from the Unit's Alan Renwick and Conor Kelly in July explored perspectives on the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (see page 14).

The coming weeks will see publication of the final report of our three-year research project examining the state of public attitudes to democracy in the UK, [Democracy in the UK after Brexit](#). This will draw the project's various strands together and tease out key lessons for policymakers. Booking is open for a [launch event](#) on 27 November, featuring leading speakers from Westminster and academia.



## Parliamentary scrutiny of government

Even though parliament has been in recess for much of the period since the previous edition of *Monitor*, controversies over the government's attitude to parliamentary scrutiny have continued.

Rishi Sunak's [speech on 20 September](#), aimed at launching a new phase of his premiership and a new climate change policy, emphasised the importance of parliamentary scrutiny. Arguing that big government decisions have often been 'lacking in debate and fundamental scrutiny', the Prime Minister was particularly critical of the [lack of parliamentary oversight](#) of the UK's last carbon budget.

Given that successive Conservative governments have been regularly criticised in recent times for resisting parliamentary scrutiny, this language might have been seen as marking a welcome change of tone.

Both the [Cabinet Manual](#) and the [Ministerial Code](#) endorse the principle that ministers should make ‘the most important announcements of government policy’ to parliament in the first instance, if it is sitting. But, as [critics were quick to point out](#), Sunak’s speech was given at a press conference, just one day after the Commons had broken up for the conference recess. While it did perhaps comply with the letter of this principle, its timing prevented the kind of scrutiny Sunak appeared to be advocating (a point [made by the Commons Energy Security and Net Zero Committee](#)).

Such a decision to bypass parliament was – again – [condemned](#) by the Commons Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, whose spokesperson went so far as to say that Hoyle would have recalled MPs ‘immediately’ had it been in his power to do so. But, as [Unit researchers have previously highlighted](#), only ministers can trigger a Commons recall. Rumours also swirled for weeks about the possible cancellation of the HS2 railway line, and this was finally announced formally by Sunak at the Conservative Party conference rather than in parliament – notwithstanding the [huge amount of parliamentary time](#) that had previously gone into debating and approving the project.

Separately, the Commons Public Accounts Committee [unsuccessfully pressed](#) the Home Office to provide more financial information about the UK–Rwanda asylum agreement. After the department’s Permanent Secretary, Matthew Rycroft, was unable to provide financial details at a public committee session on the grounds of commercial sensitivity, MPs asked whether the information might be provided privately. Rycroft later [wrote to confirm](#) that the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, had refused permission for this, without stating detailed reasons for her decision.

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## Parliamentary standards

Harriet Harman has been [elected](#) to chair the House of Commons Standards Committee, after receiving more than double the number of votes cast for fellow Labour backbencher Stella Creasy in a poll of MPs. The vacancy resulted from Chris Bryant’s [appointment](#) as Shadow Minister for Creative Industries and Digital. Harman now chairs both the Standards and the Privileges Committee, which she has led since Bryant [stood down from the latter](#) in June 2022 due to allegations of apparent bias in relation to its investigation of Boris Johnson. It [has been usual in the past](#) for the same person to chair both committees, which operated as a single committee from 1995 until 2012.

The government has [responded](#) to the Procedure Committee’s report [Correcting the Record](#) (see [Monitor 84](#)) – which proposed that the corrections process should be extended beyond ministers to all MPs, and made several recommendations to improve the visibility of corrections. The response noted that this is a matter for MPs to decide, but welcomed the committee’s recommendations: the Commons then [approved the proposals](#) on 24 October. Backbenchers and opposition frontbenchers can now make corrections in the same way as ministers, but the system still relies largely on their own willingness to do so.

Recent months have also seen decisions in several individual cases of alleged misconduct. In September, the Standards Committee [upheld a finding](#) that Rishi Sunak had committed a ‘minor and inadvertent’ breach of the [MPs’ Code of Conduct](#) by disclosing information relating to an ongoing investigation into an undeclared interest – but it recommended that no sanction be applied. Separately, former whip Chris Pincher [resigned as an MP](#) prior to a vote on a proposed eight-week suspension from the Commons, which would have triggered a recall petition (see [Monitor 84](#)). A by-election to replace him was held on 19 October (see page 7). Longtime Conservative MP Peter Bone also faces a recall petition after an [Independent Expert Panel report](#) published on 16 October upheld findings that he was guilty of sexual misconduct and bullying. The panel recommended a six-week suspension from the Commons, and MPs [approved its report without a debate](#), triggering the recall process. Labour has [said](#) that it will actively campaign in his constituency for him to be recalled.

As *Monitor* was going to press, Conservative MP Crispin Blunt [confirmed](#) that he had been arrested and interviewed under caution in relation to an allegation of rape, but vigorously denied the claims. Like Bone, Blunt has had the whip suspended. Blunt has also been asked to stay away from the parliamentary estate, but the Commons authorities cannot require him to absent himself. MPs debated House of Commons Commission [proposals on risk-based exclusion](#) on 12 June (see [Monitor 84](#)), but implementation has yet to occur.

Meanwhile, the Privileges Committee considered an allegation that the SNP’s John Nicolson had committed contempt of parliament by [disapprovingly tweeting](#) the Speaker’s decision to refuse a debate on privilege that he had requested over [controversial statements](#) by former MP Nadine Dorries. The committee concluded

that, while Nicholson's actions had been 'disruptive', his cooperation with and apology to the Speaker via the committee meant that no further action should be taken. It also suggested that the case demonstrated the need for clearer communication to MPs about expectations of confidentiality.

In the Lords, the Conduct Committee has [proposed](#) several amendments to the [Code of Conduct](#) to clarify the rules on how peers undertake 'paid parliamentary advice and activities'. It also proposed that the guidance on conduct proceedings should be amended to make clear that peers may be accompanied by a colleague, friend or legal adviser during proceedings related to their conduct.

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## Growing calls for action on Lords appointments

The [previous issue of Monitor](#) reported on high-profile controversies around Boris Johnson's honours list, including the appointment (and non-appointment in the case of Nadine Dorries and others) of peers. Those nominated have since taken their seats, including [Charlotte Owen](#) (now Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge), who became the youngest ever life peer, aged 30.

Demands have subsequently ramped up for reform to the appointments system. On 17 July the Lord Speaker's Committee on the Size of the House, chaired by Crossbencher Lord (Terry) Burns, issued an [excoriating report](#). This lamented the recent 'excessive number of appointments' and demanded urgent action. The committee calculated that under its proposed 'two out, one in' formula, 88 new members should have been appointed since 2016; there have instead been 168. While Labour appointments were roughly on target, Conservative ones vastly outstripped projections, at 88 rather than 33. The committee noted that prime ministers have also broken previous agreements to minimise their own direct appointments to the Crossbenches, which leaves minimal discretion for the House of Lords Appointments Commission (HOLAC) to choose such members. It demanded a 'fairer and more sustainable appointments system', including a firm limit on the chamber's size, and agreement between the parties of a proportionality formula. It also reiterated its demand that hereditary peer by-elections should be ended 'as soon as possible' – noting that these peers are disproportionately Conservative and overwhelmingly male. It commented that an incoming Labour government would be 'in a

difficult position' since the Conservatives now have 50% more peers than Labour. This would potentially make it far more difficult for a Labour government to get its legislation through the Lords than it has recently been for the Conservatives, and hence generate pressure to create large numbers of Labour peers in order to balance the chamber.

The Lord Speaker himself repeated some of these messages in a [speech](#) on 21 September. He argued for the need to tackle the chamber's size and appointments procedures, suggesting that HOLAC should vet all incoming members not only for propriety, but also for 'conspicuous merit' and for their willingness to contribute to the chamber's work. Any such additional HOLAC work will be overseen by a new chair: Baroness (Ruth) Deech has been [announced](#) as the preferred candidate to succeed Lord (Paul) Bew. She faced a [pre-appointment scrutiny hearing](#) with the Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) on 24 October, where she [appeared eager](#) to take on such responsibilities should the government propose them.



[Baroness \(Ruth\) Deech](#) (CC BY 3.0).

Meanwhile, there are rumours that Labour is retreating from immediate plans to replace the Lords with an elected chamber. [It was reported](#) in early October that the leadership now favours a two-stage approach, starting with immediate steps to limit the chamber's size, strengthen HOLAC and remove the hereditary peers. This would be in line with the proposals above, and with [those made earlier this year](#) by Unit Director Meg Russell.

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## MPs' staff

The Speaker's Conference on the employment of MPs' staff – a cross-party committee chaired by the Speaker – published its [second report](#) on 20 July. The report sets out a broad but detailed package of measures to address

the challenges faced by staff who are directly employed by MPs to work in their offices. The committee's remit allowed it to recommend a change to the current employment model, such as a standardised system of recruitment and employment administered by parliament itself, which might have met concerns [raised by unions and staff](#) about the current system. But the committee concluded that such a change lacked sufficient support and would incur undue expense.

Recognising that better support for both MPs and staff is needed, the report recommended an expansion of the services offered by the Members' Services Team (MST), which was established following Gemma White's 2019 report, [Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff](#). The committee recommended that the MST should provide HR guidance directly to staff and better assist MPs in carrying out their HR functions, and that its name be changed to reflect this dual role.

The report also made recommendations regarding the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), such as changing the way in which it reports staff costs, due to [concerns](#) that the current method provides a misleading view of MPs' expenses claims.

The government has missed a September deadline to respond to the report, and a Commons debate has yet to take place.

Readers interested in the subject of MPs' staff can read a new [Unit report](#), which offers a unique and detailed insight into who they are and what they do (see page 14).

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## Restoration and Renewal

Uncertainty continues to surround the plans for the Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster. While a strategic case for the works is still [due](#) to be debated by MPs and peers before the end of 2023, parliamentarians are [expected](#) to be asked only to approve further research on two delivery options, rather than make a final decision on how to proceed. These options are expected to be either that MPs and staff move out of the Palace entirely (known as the 'full decant' option), or that MPs remain on the parliamentary estate during the works (referred to in policy documents as 'continued presence'). A final decision on which of the two options to pursue is now not expected until after the next general election, which will be more than six years after [MPs voted in favour of a 'full and timely decant'](#).

If politicians choose to maintain a continued presence on the parliamentary estate, they may have to do so without security officials, cleaners, caterers and clerks: [minutes](#) of the Restoration and Renewal Programme Board revealed that the most senior officials in the Commons and Lords have warned that, while they could not prevent parliamentarians from meeting within the Palace, they 'could indicate that staff were not required to work in an unsafe building, meaning that the Houses would potentially be sitting entirely without staff support'.

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## Election of Commons committee chairs

As reported above, Harriet Harman was elected as chair of the Committee on Standards on 18 October. Two further vacancies arose because the incumbent chairs were appointed to the Labour front bench in September.

Catherine McKinnell, chair of the Petitions Committee, was appointed Shadow Minister for Schools. Cat Smith was [elected](#) as her successor, beating Liz Twist and Marsha de Cordova. Liam Byrne was [elected](#) to chair the Business and Trade Committee, defeating Angela Eagle and Andy McDonald. He replaced Darren Jones, who became Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury.



[Cat Smith, new chair of the Petitions Committee \(CC BY 3.0\)](#).

Robert Courts was [elected](#) chair of the Defence Committee on 25 October. The vacancy arose following the [resignation of Conservative Tobias Ellwood](#) after he made comments construed as overly supportive of the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Four members of the committee (two Labour and two Conservatives) tabled a motion of no confidence in July, but no vote took place due to the Commons entering summer recess. Ellwood then resigned in September, despite claiming to still have the support of a majority of committee members.

## Elections, referendums and democratic engagement



### Electoral Commission report on voter ID in the May local elections

As is customary, the Electoral Commission published its [report](#) on the annual round of spring local elections in September. The report particularly focused on the impact of introducing a voter ID requirement at polling stations in England. It confirmed the Commission's [interim analysis](#) published in June, which concluded that at least 14,000 people had been unable to vote because of the new rules, and that some groups – particularly the disabled and unemployed – had been disadvantaged more than others (see [Monitor 84](#)).

The September report elaborated on these findings and highlighted two mechanisms through which the ID requirement had hindered voting: 'variations in ownership of accepted photo ID and in awareness of the need to show ID when voting in person'. It also set out five recommendations. First, it said that the list of valid forms of ID should be reviewed 'to identify any additional documents that could be included to improve accessibility for voters'. Second, it said that the government 'should explore whether the deadline for Voter Authority Certificate applications could be moved closer to polling day'. Third, it suggested that someone with valid ID should be able to vouch for someone without proper documentation at a polling station. Fourth, it proposed that polling station staff should continue to collect data on the impact of voter ID. Finally, it said that procedures for collecting such data should be improved to make them easy for all polling station staff to follow.

The Commission's report also examined other aspects of the elections. Drawing on survey evidence, it concluded that satisfaction with and confidence in the electoral process remains high. But it also highlighted several problems. Some disabled voters had experienced difficulties in registering or voting. Significant numbers of voters felt that they had lacked the information they needed on candidates or on what the elections were about. Some campaigners – 'from across the political spectrum' – had issued misleading campaign materials. Many candidates had experienced intimidation and harassment. Administrators had delivered well-run elections but will face further challenges in 2024.

The Commission made recommendations for action on all of these points.

### New spending limits for parties at elections

The Levelling Up Secretary, Michael Gove, announced in a [written statement](#) in July that ministers intend to uprate party and candidate campaign spending limits in line with inflation. The threshold above which information about donations must be published will also be uprated (though the threshold above which donations must comply with regulations will not).

While such changes may sound innocuous, in fact they are significant. Many of these limits and thresholds were first introduced in 2000 and have not been changed since. As explained by Professor Justin Fisher in a [post on the Unit's blog](#), inflation over the intervening years has roughly halved their real value. Thus, the spending limit for a party running in all seats in Great Britain (except that contested by the Speaker) will rise from just under £19 million to around £38 million. In the post, it was argued that uprating is desirable in principle, given the importance of parties' ability to communicate with voters, but that such a dramatic leap introduced shortly before an election could generate unfairness. He recommended a phased transition instead.

The changes can be made by ministers without a parliamentary vote, but this had not yet happened by the time *Monitor* went to press.

### By-elections and recall petitions

Six parliamentary by-elections have taken place since the last issue of *Monitor*. One of these – in Rutherglen and Hamilton West – was the third to be triggered by a successful recall petition, under provisions introduced by the [Recall of MPs Act 2015](#). The sitting MP, Margaret Ferrier, had been suspended from the House of Commons for 30 days for breaching Covid-19 regulations (see [Monitor 84](#)). A suspension of 10 days or more triggers the recall process, under which an MP is ousted if 10% of their constituents sign a petition. The [petition results](#) were announced on 1 August, and 14.7% of Ferrier's constituents had signed. The SNP [selected an alternative candidate](#) before the outcome of the petition was known, and Ferrier [opted not to stand as an independent](#). In the ensuing by-election, held on 5 October, Labour overturned the SNP's previous majority with an [unexpectedly large swing](#) of 20.4%.

The impact of the recall provisions was further evident in two of the other by-elections. In these cases – in Uxbridge and South Ruislip on 20 July and in Tamworth on 19 October – the sitting MPs (respectively, Boris Johnson and Chris Pincher) had been recommended for suspensions after being found guilty of wrongdoing but had chosen to resign before MPs had actually voted on those recommendations. They were the [third and fourth MPs](#) to respond to the possibility of recall in this way, after [Owen Paterson](#) in November 2021 and [Chris Matheson](#) in October 2022. The Conservatives narrowly held on in the Uxbridge vote; they lost to Labour in Tamworth on a 23.9% swing, the [second highest Conservative–Labour swing](#) at any by-election since the Second World War.

In the other three cases, the previous MPs had resigned without being directly pushed. On 20 July, [the Conservatives lost](#) both Selby and Ainsty (previously held by [Nigel Adams](#)) and Somerton and Frome (the former seat of [David Warburton](#)) – the first to Labour, the second to the Liberal Democrats. The election in Mid Bedfordshire, held on 19 October, had a more complicated backstory. The previous MP, Nadine Dorries, had announced her intention to resign at the same time as Johnson and Adams, but had then delayed for several months, apparently because she was seeking further information on why she had not been appointed to the House of Lords (see [Monitor 84](#)). The election itself then became an unusual three-way battle between the Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrats. On 19 October, [Labour came out on top](#), with the Conservatives second and the Liberal Democrats third.



[Swearing in of new MP Alistair Strathern](#) (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) by [UK Parliament](#).

## Executive



### Government response to reports on ethical standards

In July the government published its long-awaited [response](#) to three reports: [Upholding Standards in Public Life](#), by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), Nigel Boardman's [report](#) into the collapse of Greensill Capital, and a report by the Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC), [Propriety of Governance in Light of Greensill](#). The PACAC report was published in December 2022, and responses to the other two had been outstanding since 2021.

CSPL and PACAC had both recommended that three ethical watchdogs, the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA), the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests and the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) should all be given a statutory foundation, together with their associated codes of practice. The government rejected that key recommendation on the basis that 'placing scrutiny bodies into primary legislation risks drawing the Courts into political matters that are the sole purview of the Government'.

The government instead announced a more limited package of reforms. The [business appointment rules](#), which regulate post-Whitehall employment, will be tightened to make compliance mandatory for ministers and senior civil servants. There will be greater transparency around lobbying, with a single database to be published by the Cabinet Office covering all departmental transparency returns on meetings, gifts, hospitality, and travel. The appointment of [non-executive directors](#) to Whitehall boards will be subject to regulation by OCPA, and departments will publish a list of direct ministerial appointments (such as 'czars', or Nigel Boardman's own appointment by the Cabinet Office) that are unregulated.

Almost half of the recommendations from CSPL and PACAC were rejected, including any which would strengthen the independence of most of the existing constitutional watchdogs, or give them more effective powers. The one exception is ACOBA. Civil servants' contracts will be tightened to make compliance with

the rules mandatory, and a ‘deed of undertaking’ will be developed so that the same principle applies to ministers. But no timetable has been set, and it is unclear who will be responsible for monitoring or enforcing compliance should a breach of the rules occur – or whether enforcement is possible unless the ACOBA rules have statutory backing.

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## Maude review of governance and accountability in the civil service

In July 2022 the government [announced](#) a review of governance and accountability in Whitehall, to be led by former Cabinet Office minister Lord (Francis) Maude of Horsham. At the Conservative Party conference Lord Maude [outlined](#) some of his main recommendations, which were submitted to ministers in the summer, but are unavailable to the public. The key proposals are that the Treasury should be split up, and the role of the Cabinet Secretary strengthened. Maude also proposed that ministers should undergo performance reviews by subordinates and colleagues, and that they should have more say in the appointment of civil servants.



[Lord \(Francis\) Maude of Horsham \(CC BY 2.0\)](#) by [FCDO](#).

This review repeats familiar criticisms of Whitehall: its over-reliance on generalists, prioritisation of policy over operational skills, and the rapid turnover of senior officials. Little has changed. Maude hopes to solve this by recommending that the job of Cabinet Secretary be split into two separate roles.

The proposals envisage that a Permanent Secretary for Number 10 – a post that [existed briefly](#) under Boris Johnson – would advise the Prime Minister as part of a strategic centre of government, in which Downing Street would absorb most of the Cabinet Office. A separate head of the civil service would then become Whitehall's

Chief Operating Officer, with the power and authority to effect change.

The new head of the civil service would run a separate ministry in charge of allocating money to departments and overseeing their performance. The Treasury would lose oversight of public spending, but retain control of taxation, financial regulation, and macroeconomic policy. This would align with similar systems in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The postholder would also be given direct management powers over the civil service. Ministers would have more say in the appointment of civil servants, overseen by the Civil Service Commission.

The government's response to the review is being coordinated by Jeremy Quin, Paymaster General and minister in the Cabinet Office. It is unclear when it – or the review itself – will be published.

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## The appointment and removal of permanent secretaries

On 20 October the Lords Constitution Committee published a [report](#) into how permanent secretaries should be appointed and removed. The inquiry had been triggered by the [departure of several permanent secretaries](#) in the first year of Boris Johnson's premiership, and the [abrupt sacking](#) last October of the Treasury's Permanent Secretary, Tom Scholar, by Liz Truss. The report proposes no change to the appointment process, which is overseen by the Civil Service Commission, with ministers allowed input into the job description, person specification and composition of the panel, and the Prime Minister selecting an appointee from the ensuing list of candidates.

The committee did recommend that the appointment process for the Cabinet Secretary should be regularised and made transparent. It said that this process should also be outlined in an updated Cabinet Manual, to instil greater confidence in the management of the civil service. This is the second time in just over two years that the committee has called for the Cabinet Manual to be updated: it produced [a report dedicated to the subject](#) in July 2021 (see [Monitor 79](#)).

The Civil Service Commission is currently involved only in recruitment, as the guardian of the principle of appointment on merit through fair and open competition. The committee suggested that it could also have a role



in the dismissal of senior civil servants on performance or conduct grounds, to examine whether due process is followed. But the role would be very limited: the report merely suggested that '[f]ormal departure processes should be set out in writing, requiring ministers and the Prime Minister to explain to the Civil Service Commission – in private if necessary – their decision to remove and replace a senior civil servant'. The report did not offer a view on what the Commission might do if it found that due process had not been followed.

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## Government loses FOI case on policymaking documents

The government has been ordered to disclose an equality impact assessment (EIA) of the stop-and-search elements of its 2021 Beating Crime Plan. The information was originally sought as part of an application for judicial review, but the Home Office subsequently decided to reconsider the policy on the basis that its EIA was flawed. A request was then made for the EIA's disclosure. The government refused, on the basis that the policymaking process was ongoing, citing [section 35 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000](#), which permits the government to refuse to disclose information [related to the formulation and development of government policy](#) if release would not be in the public interest.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) accepted the government's arguments that it was not in the public interest to release the data. But the First-tier Tribunal's General Regulatory Chamber concluded that the ICO 'naively' took the government's arguments 'at face value' and that there would be 'no harms' caused by disclosure. In a [judgment](#) that was highly critical of the ICO's reasoning, it concluded that the government was wrong

to claim that the policy process was ongoing at the time of the refusal to disclose. It also dismissed the ICO's reliance on a potential chilling effect on policy advice as disrespectful to the experts who give it, and said that to apply the ICO's reasoning on a large scale would mean justifying the withholding of other documents which, like EIAs, are routinely disclosed. The Tribunal ordered the government to release the information in full, and the government consented to do so.

## Nations and regions




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### England

While devolution policy in England has continued to creep forward in the second half of 2023, the profile of English devolution has likely never been higher. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, extended the [Ultra Low Emission Zone \(ULEZ\)](#) across the whole of London. This decision caused considerable unrest, with reports that the Prime Minister had considered preventing the change, and a [failed attempt](#) by four London boroughs to have the policy declared unlawful. The House of Lords [accepted a government amendment](#) to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill that would permit boroughs to opt out of similar schemes in certain circumstances.

Little information is available on prospective new devolution deals. Negotiations for mayoral deals appear to have progressed in [Hull & East Riding](#) and [Greater Lincolnshire](#). '[Greater Essex](#)' and [Dorset](#) have announced that they are seeking a 'level 2 deal' (with no mayoralty and fewer powers). It is likely that any new

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agreements will come into force no earlier than 2025 and other localities may now decide that the proximity of a general election means that it might be worth waiting to see if a new government will offer a better deal.

Meanwhile, the government has published a new [Accountability Framework](#), and a new scrutiny protocol for mayoral authorities is anticipated by the end of this year.

Elsewhere, more information has become available about Labour's likely plans for English devolution. It was [reported](#) in October that the party's National Policy Forum had recommended that the government's current individual 'deal-making' approach – which is flexible but inconsistent – would be replaced with a 'strategic and sectoral' plan for devolving powers. Enhanced economic devolution was explicitly promised, to be effected by a 'Take Back Control Act', as [announced by Keir Starmer](#) in January. Starmer [confirmed these plans](#) during his party conference speech in October, promising that local government would be given new powers and expanding local control over adult education and bus services. This followed a number of recent publications contributing to Labour's thinking, including the Brown Commission's [A New Britain](#), New Local's [A Labour Vision for Community Power](#), and the Fabian Society's [Plans for Power](#).

Despite having big proposals for devolution, Starmer has experienced numerous difficulties in his relationship with the party's elected mayors. North of Tyne's mayor, Jamie Driscoll, [left the Labour Party](#) on 17 July after failing to make its shortlist for the new North-East mayoralty. He intends to stand as an independent candidate when the election is held in May. Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham joined his Liverpool counterpart, Steve Rotherham, in [complaining about Driscoll's treatment](#), calling the process of excluding him opaque and unfair. Sadiq Khan was also [reportedly unhappy with comments by Starmer on ULEZ](#) after the Labour leader blamed the policy for the Conservative victory in the Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election. Sue Gray, Starmer's new Chief of Staff, organised [a meeting between Starmer and the party's mayors](#) in an attempt to reset relations.

Rishi Sunak has also had difficulties in his relationship with one of his mayors: in the West Midlands, rumours circulated [that Andy Street would resign](#) from the Conservative Party over the government's decision to significantly scale back the HS2 rail project, although [ultimately he did not do so](#).

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## Northern Ireland

The main institutions of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement [remain in abeyance](#), with the DUP's boycott now more than 18 months old. The UK government has been in private negotiation with the party over its demands around the Northern Ireland Protocol. At its conference in mid-October, the party's leadership seemed to be [tentatively preparing the way](#) for reinstating the Northern Ireland Executive.

Until that happens, civil servants must make day-to-day decisions, but without much (if any) accountability, and with circumscribed powers. They cannot act on the serious weaknesses in Northern Ireland public services, such as [the NHS](#). The administration, without a budget or Executive, overspent last year. London then set a reduced budget, but declined to say where, within departmental allocations, cuts should fall, leaving those decisions to civil servants. The result has been suboptimal, and [civil servants believe that they can cut no further](#) – leaving another overspend to be carried forward. A shortfall of [over £2 billion](#) is expected in the next financial year, as London explores ways to reduce spending and increase revenue.

Meanwhile consensus policing, a key success of the Agreement settlement is at risk once again. Chief Constable Simon Byrne [resigned in September](#) after allegations that he disciplined officers for an incident because of concerns that Sinn Féin might otherwise leave the Policing Board.

The government's [Northern Ireland Troubles \(Legacy and Reconciliation\) Act](#) was passed in September, despite opposition from [all of Northern Ireland's main political parties](#), the [Irish government](#) and the [UK Labour Party](#), which undertook to repeal it when next in government. Its provisions include halting some criminal and civil proceedings and inquests. The High Court will hear a [legal challenge](#) to the Act in November, the primary focus of which will be arguments that the legislation is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. The Irish government is [considering](#) a separate application to the European Court of Human Rights on the basis that the legislation might breach [Article 2](#), which provides that 'everybody's right to life shall be protected by law'.

In this polarised atmosphere, possibilities of Irish unity continue to attract attention. Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar recently [said that he expected to see a united Ireland in his lifetime](#), a comment that Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris [labelled 'unhelpful'](#).

Keir Starmer has [downplayed prospects of an early border poll on unification](#) should he become Prime Minister. But the new Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary, Hilary Benn, has [suggested](#) that a Labour government would be more active on Northern Ireland matters. He called the Agreement ‘the towering achievement of the last Labour government’ and condemned recent Conservative governments for undermining the UK’s relationship with Ireland. He pointed out the Prime Minister’s continuing absence from Northern Ireland political negotiations, undertaking that Starmer would take a greater role should he become Prime Minister.



[New Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary Hilary Benn MP \(CC BY 2.0\) by Chatham House.](#)

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## Scotland

First Minister Humza Yousaf oversaw his first SNP conference as party leader in October. On independence, he has adopted a variant of his predecessor’s de facto referendum policy: that if the party wins a majority of Scottish seats at the next general election [it will treat this as a mandate](#) for negotiating independence with the UK government. The policy is widely regarded as unrealistic, [including by some SNP MPs and MSPs, as well as activists](#). It seems unlikely that those circumstances would be sufficient in themselves to prompt a UK government to agree to an independence referendum.

Divisions within the SNP are not confined to the best method of securing independence. Fergus Ewing, an MSP and former minister, was [suspended as a party member](#) for voting with the opposition on a motion of no confidence in government minister and Green co-leader Lorna Slater. MP Lisa Cameron [defected to the Conservatives](#) in October, citing a ‘toxic and

bullying environment’ within the party. Later that same month, MSP and former leadership contender Ash Regan [announced](#) that she was joining Alba, giving that party its first seat in the Scottish Parliament. Such divisions have contributed to a [decline in support for the SNP](#), which was highlighted by [Labour’s victory in the Rutherglen by-election](#) (see page 6). A [poll conducted by Savanta](#) even suggested that the SNP’s hold on Holyrood could be threatened. Polled views on independence, however, [remain largely unchanged](#) (see page 12).

As political attention moves away from constitutional change, the SNP’s domestic record is subject to political challenge, most notably over Western Isles ferries, the construction of which are [years late and hundreds of millions of pounds over budget](#). And challenges to the Scottish government are not just coming from inside Scotland: UK ministers have become increasingly active and interventionist in devolved matters. The [Sewel convention](#) has been disregarded [more than once](#) in recent years, and Yousaf inherited two legal challenges to UK interventions in devolved legislation, on [gender recognition reform](#) (see [Monitor 83](#)) and on [recycling](#), where the UK government relies on the controversial [UK Internal Market Act](#) (see [Monitor 84](#)). These tensions colour intergovernmental relations, which have been [strained for some time](#) and are the subject of [an inquiry](#) by the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee.

Looming over of all this is the police investigation into alleged financial irregularities in the SNP. There have been no significant developments in relation to the investigation since it was discussed in [Monitor 84](#).

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## Wales

The Senedd reform agenda continues in Wales, where the Welsh government has introduced its [Senedd Cymru \(Members and Elections\) Bill](#). The legislation was a key policy pledge in the Labour administration’s [Cooperation Agreement](#) with Plaid Cymru. The effects of the bill would be to expand the Senedd from 60 to 96 members, change the electoral system for the Senedd to one based entirely [on closed party lists](#), and reduce the length of Senedd terms to four years. Candidates would be required to have a registered address in Wales. The maximum number of ministers would also be expanded, from 12 to 17. And a review would be required after the next election of [proposals](#) to allow Senedd members and ministers to job share.

Proposals to ensure a mandatory gender balance in the Senedd's membership are expected to be included in a separate bill in order to avoid a confrontation with the UK government over whether the Senedd has competence to enact a policy related to 'equal opportunities', an area reserved to Westminster. Earlier in the year, First Minister Mark Drakeford [indicated](#) that his ministers believe that they have the legislative competence, but that he was delaying legislation on gender quotas so that the rest of the reform proposals can be passed and implemented before the next election in 2026.

On 2 October, the Welsh government introduced the [Elections and Elected Bodies \(Wales\) Bill](#), which would create an Electoral Management Board for Wales to oversee Senedd and local elections. This body would complement, rather than replace, the role of the Electoral Commission in Wales. Additional measures in the bill include the creation of a system of automatic voter registration and the introduction of new duties to promote diversity and accessibility in elections.

Rishi Sunak's [announcement](#) that he intends to scale back the HS2 rail project may well have an unintended impact on the Welsh budget. HS2 financing has been a topic of constitutional interest in Wales for some years because rail infrastructure is not devolved – unlike in Scotland and Northern Ireland – and UK spending announcements therefore have an indirect effect on the size of the Welsh budget. HS2 was classified by the Treasury as a project benefiting 'England and Wales'. This affected the '[programme-level comparability factor](#)' which determines how much money Wales receives as a result of increases in the size of the budget of the Department for Transport. Neither of the two leading UK parties appear to support the full devolution of rail infrastructure, which would offer a constitutional solution to such funding disputes.

Looking ahead, it remains the case that a potential change of government in London would create a new constitutional scenario for Wales, whereby negotiation between the Welsh and UK Labour parties might result in a further transfer of powers to Cardiff.

The final report of the [Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales](#), which should be produced before the end of this year, will likely shape the mood in both the Senedd and the wider Welsh population on what kind of reform might be needed to better stabilise the country's constitutional arrangements.

## Public attitudes to the constitution



### Public opinion on constitutional matters

A [report](#) by More in Common and the UCL Policy Lab used exclusive polling to argue that large-scale constitutional reforms such as abolishing the House of Lords or introducing proportional representation at general elections would not in themselves make voters feel 'respected'. Rather, politicians would need to show empathy, authenticity, and honesty, and also deliver on policy. These findings chime with those of the Constitution Unit's [Democracy in the UK after Brexit](#) project, which [found](#) more emphatic public support for cultural changes – such as greater honesty in politics – than for ambitious constitutional reforms.

Polling by YouGov [found widespread support](#) for the requirement – introduced in the Elections Act 2022 – that people provide photographic ID to vote at polling stations. Overall, 63% of respondents supported the change, while 28% opposed it, with Conservative and Leave voters more likely to be favour. [Views on compulsory voting were more divided](#), with equal percentages advocating and rejecting the idea.

Public attitudes towards the monarchy have become slightly more approving (by four percentage points) since the coronation of King Charles III, according to [research by Ipsos](#). Its survey found that 66% of respondents wanted to retain the monarchy, while 25% preferred a move to a republic.

## International



### Australian referendum proposal defeated

On 14 October, Australians voted against a proposal to amend the country's constitution in a way that would have enhanced the political rights of [Indigenous Australians](#) (also known as Australia's First Peoples). The [proposal](#) would have provided constitutional recognition for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia, and established a body called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, which would have had a constitutional footing, making

it impossible to abolish without a referendum. The Voice would have had the right to make representations to parliament and the government on matters related to Indigenous Australians.

The proposals had their origins in the [Uluru dialogues](#), set up by Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. The ensuing [Uluru Statement](#) called for a substantive constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians in the form of a body called the Voice. The proposal was taken forward by the Labor government led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

The referendum campaign was [heated and divisive](#). The government-backed [Yes campaign](#) pointed to the [challenges](#) faced by Indigenous Australians, including higher rates of suicide, incarceration and hospitalisation. It argued that a constitutionally recognised Voice could help to address these shortfalls.



[A rally in favour of a Yes vote.](#)

The No campaign criticised the proposal as lacking in detail and argued that it risked creating legal uncertainty, delays in the legislative process and duplication of existing advisory bodies. Experts [expressed concerns in a joint letter](#) about the accuracy of some of these claims and ‘misunderstandings and misconceptions’ which led to ‘incorrect and sometimes erroneous views’ about how the proposed body would work.

Voters [rejected the proposals](#) by a margin of 60% to 40%. There had been fears among reform supporters that it might fail due to the double majority requirement for Australian constitutional amendments, whereby a national majority is not enough and the proposal for change must also be approved in a majority of states. But in the end, none of the six states voted in favour; only in the Australian Capital Territory was a Yes majority recorded. Questions remain about how other components of the Uluru statement should be implemented.

## People on the move

Keir Starmer reshuffled the Shadow Cabinet in September. Deputy Leader **Angela Rayner** was appointed Shadow Levelling Up Secretary, replacing **Lisa Nandy**, who moved to another frontbench role.

**Pat McFadden** was appointed to Rayner’s former post of Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and also replaced **Shabana Mahmood** as national campaign coordinator. Joining McFadden in the Shadow Cabinet Office team is **Nick Thomas-Symonds**, who will deal with many aspects of constitutional policy. Mahmood was appointed Shadow Justice Secretary, with incumbent **Steve Reed** taking a different brief.

Former Cabinet minister **Hilary Benn** was appointed to shadow the Northern Ireland Office. He took over from **Peter Kyle**, who moved to another post.

**Lucy Powell** and **Thangam Debbonaire** swapped posts, becoming Leader of the Commons and Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport respectively.

**Harriet Harman** was elected to replace **Chris Bryant** as Chair of the Standards Committee following his appointment as a junior shadow minister (see page 3). **Catherine McKinnell** resigned as Chair of the Petitions Committee for the same reason, with **Cat Smith** elected to replace her.

**John Benger** retired from parliament and his role as Clerk of the Commons on 30 September. **Tom Goldsmith**, who had previously served as Principal Clerk of the Table Office, was appointed as Benger’s successor.

**Dehenna Davison** resigned as a junior minister at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in September. **Jacob Young**, a government whip, was appointed to replace her.

**Julie Harrison** took over as Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office in September. **Madeline Alessandri** left the post in July after being appointed to chair the Joint Intelligence Committee.

**Lord Kitchin** retired from the UK Supreme Court in September. **Lady Justice Simler** has been appointed to replace him, effective from 14 November.

The first Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales (the former **Lady Justice Carr**) took office on 2 October, following the retirement of **Lord Burnett of Maldon** in September.

**Lord (Jonathan) Evans of Weardale** stepped down as Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life in October.

**Lord (Paul) Bew** has stepped down as chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission. **Baroness (Ruth) Deech** has been nominated to succeed him (see page 4).

## Constitution Unit news

### New report on MPs' staff

On 3 October the Unit published a new report, *[MPs' Staff, the Unsung Heroes: An Examination of Who They Are and What They Do](#)*. This was the final output from Dr Rebecca McKee's [British Academy Fellowship](#), which ran from 2018 to 2022. The report draws from a wide range of sources, including historical and comparative data, freedom of information requests, and a unique survey of MPs' staff conducted by the author. It paints the most complete picture yet seen of this crucial cadre of roughly 3500 staff.



Dr Rebecca McKee.

The report outlines how arrangements for MPs' staff evolved gradually, with each MP now able to employ the equivalent of five full-time staff divided between parliamentary and constituency offices. Funding is administered by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), but there is otherwise very limited central oversight. The report discusses the different roles undertaken by these staff, the support available to them, and how they view their jobs. It finds a stark contrast between constituency and parliamentary staff demographically, with those based in constituency offices generally older and more likely to be female, and those based in parliament (particularly researchers) disproportionately young and male. It explores how postholders got their jobs, finding that informal connections can be important, and that an emphasis on past parliamentary experience may perpetuate existing inequalities. Coming alongside the recent report of the [Speaker's Conference on the employment of MPs' staff](#) (see page 4), these results include important insights and food for thought regarding possible changes to the system. A summary of the report's findings and conclusions can be found [on the Unit's blog](#).

### New report: *Perspectives on the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement*

The Unit published a new report in July examining [perspectives on the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement](#) over the last 25 years. Written by Alan Renwick and Conor Kelly, the report analyses manifestos, expert interviews, and focus groups to explore how the Agreement is seen across Northern Ireland's different communities, and among politicians, civil servants, and other experts.

The manifesto analysis shows a marked change in attitudes since 1998. Early disagreements initially eased over time and, during the decade of stable government after 2007, the Agreement became the settled will across the parties for how Northern Ireland would be governed. Tensions have re-emerged since then, however – though politicians on all sides still view the Agreement as 'the only game in town'.

The focus groups identified wide support for the Agreement and the principle of power-sharing among the public. But there are important pockets of opposition, and all parts of the community have concerns about how aspects of the Agreement are working.

The report's conclusions emphasised the need for positive engagement from policymakers in London and Dublin, which has been insufficiently evident in recent years. In particular, it highlighted the need for concerted efforts to rebuild trust. A summary of the report's analysis and conclusions appears on [the Unit's blog](#).

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### Alan Renwick's evidence to the Welsh Senedd Reform Bill Committee

On 26 October, Alan Renwick gave [oral evidence](#) to the [Senedd Reform Bill Committee](#), which is scrutinising [legislative proposals](#) to expand the Senedd's membership and change its electoral system (see page 11). He spoke in his capacity as a former member of the [Expert Panel on Electoral Reform](#), which reported in 2017 in favour of enlarging the chamber, and appeared alongside the panel's chair, Professor Laura McAllister. He welcomed the proposed increase in the number of Senedd members, but criticised the plan to introduce a fully [closed-list voting system](#). He also said that the maximum number of ministers should be set by primary, not secondary, legislation, and urged stronger protections for the independence of the boundary review process.

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### LEF briefings

Two further briefings from the Unit's project on [Constitutional Principles and the Health of Democracy](#), funded by the Legal Education Foundation, have been published. The [first briefing](#), published in September, explains the purpose, and the various forms, of parliamentary scrutiny. The second, published in November, is on [political discourse](#). They follow earlier briefings on a range of core constitutional topics, including the roles of [regulators](#) and the [civil service](#). Briefings are published on the Unit's blog and are available in PDF format from the [project webpage](#).

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### Staff changes

In September, the Unit was delighted to welcome back [Dr Ruxandra Serban](#), who rejoined UCL's Department of Political Science as an Associate Lecturer in Democratic and Authoritarian Politics. Ruxandra was previously an LSE Fellow, before which she completed her PhD with Unit Director Meg Russell and Deputy Director Alan Renwick, on parliamentary procedures for questioning prime ministers.

We are also pleased to gain a new parliamentary specialist: Hannah Kelly has been appointed as Research Assistant to Dr Tom Fleming's project on [The Politics of Parliamentary Procedure](#). Hannah has recently completed an MSc at Birkbeck, University of London, and has worked in parliament for MPs Frank Field and Lucy Powell. She joins us in November.

We also greatly look forward to working again with [Rowan Hall](#), who rejoined us in October as Impact Researcher, having been a Unit research volunteer last year. But we are very sorry to say goodbye to Sophie Andrews-McCarroll, whose role he takes over. Sophie has left us to take up an exciting position as Policy Analyst for the House of Lords International Agreements Committee. We thank her for all her fantastic work.

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### Research volunteers

The Unit is, as always, grateful for the excellent work done by its research volunteers. A big thank you to former volunteers Greg Chilson, Luke Illott, Samuel Talalay and Hanna Vine.



### Subscribe to the Constitution Unit podcast

The [Constitution Unit podcast](#) allows you to listen to audio recordings of our events, as well as topical episodes featuring analysis and commentary from our team of researchers. You can find a full episode list [here](#), or subscribe via a range of podcast providers, including [Apple](#), [Google](#) and [Spotify](#).

# Bulletin Board

## Events recently made available online

Recordings of all Unit events are available online, via the Unit's [podcast](#) and [YouTube](#) pages. To sign up for future events, please visit the Unit's [events page](#). Events are free and open to all.

### [Reflections on over 20 years of reporting on parliament](#)

**Mark D'Arcy**, former BBC parliamentary correspondent.

Chair: **Professor Meg Russell**, Director of the Constitution Unit.

*Recorded on 24 October.*

### [How Westminster Works... and why it doesn't](#)

**Ian Dunt**, journalist and author, **Dr Ruth Fox**, Director of the Hansard Society, **Jill Rutter**, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Government, **Professor Alan Renwick**, Deputy Director of the Constitution Unit.

Chair: **Dr Tom Fleming**, Lecturer in British and Comparative Politics at the Constitution Unit.

*Recorded on 14 September.*

## Upcoming events

### [The Future of Democracy in the UK: Public Attitudes and Policy Options](#)

**Professor Alan Renwick**, Principal Investigator of the [Democracy in the UK after Brexit](#) project, **Wendy Chamberlain**, Liberal Democrat Chief Whip, **Damian Green**, former First Secretary of State, **Maria Sobolewska**, Professor of Political Science at the University of Manchester, **Nick Thomas-Symonds**, Shadow Cabinet Office minister.

Chair: **Professor Meg Russell**.

27 November at 1pm.

## Unit in the news

Meg Russell appeared on LBC's [Shelagh Fogarty](#) show to discuss options for reform of the House of Lords (25 July).

The Unit's joint report with the Institute for Government, [Rebuilding and Renewing the Constitution: Options for Reform](#), was the subject of a news article in [Civil Service World](#) (19 July). The report was also referred to positively in a [Guardian](#) editorial (13 August).

Robert Hazell was quoted in an article published on [Mental Floss](#) about the role of women who are heirs to the throne (19 July).

Alan Renwick was quoted in an article on [Civil Service World](#) about the need to include the public in the formulation and development of government policy (21 July).

The Unit's report, [Perspectives on the Good Friday Agreement](#), was discussed in a comment piece by Brian Walker on [Slugger O'Toole](#) (27 July).

Robert Hazell was quoted in relation to his work on the Ministerial Code in a news report on [Yahoo!](#) about Scottish independence (27 July).

Polling conducted by the Unit's [Democracy in the UK after Brexit project](#) was referred to in an [Observer](#) comment piece about parliamentary standards (30 July).

Alan Renwick discussed a wide range of subjects, including his work on deliberative democracy, during an interview with the [UCL Policy Lab](#) (6 August).

Meg Russell was quoted in an [inews](#) article about the selection of parliamentary candidates (10 August).

Robert Hazell was quoted in a [Wall Street Journal](#) article assessing the first year of King Charles III's reign (8 September).

Bob Morris was quoted in a [New York Post](#) article on how Princess Diana's title would have changed had she remarried (8 September). His comments were reprinted in a similar article on the [List](#) (14 September).

Ruxandra Serban appeared on Radio 4's [Today in Parliament](#) to discuss how prime ministers are questioned in parliaments outside the UK (16 September).



# Bulletin Board

The recent book [The Parliamentary Battle over Brexit](#), by Meg Russell and Lisa James, was referred to in a comment piece in the [Guardian](#) about renegotiating the UK's relationship with the European Union (18 September).

The Lord Speaker, Lord (John) McFall of Alcuith, cited Unit research on the role of the Lords in parliamentary scrutiny of legislation during [a speech to the RSA](#) (21 September).

Meg Russell's report, [House of Lords Reform: Navigating the Obstacles](#), was cited in a [Constitution Society blogpost](#) previewing party conference season (28 September).

Alan Renwick and Unit researcher Conor Kelly spoke on the [ARINS podcast](#) about reform of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (5 October).

Alan Whysall discussed the possibility of a border poll in Northern Ireland on BBC Radio Ulster's [Talkback](#) (6 October).

The Unit was mentioned as a subject of admiration by writer Ian Dunt in an article published via [Substack](#) (13 October).

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## Committee appearances

Alan Renwick gave evidence to the Senedd Reform Bill Committee on proposals to change how Members of the Senedd are elected ([26 October](#)).

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## Unit publications

Rebecca McKee, [MPs' Staff, the Unsung Heroes: An Examination of Who They Are and What They Do](#) (Unit report, October).

Alan Renwick and Conor J Kelly, [Perspectives on the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement: Examining Diverse Views: 1998-2003](#) (Unit report, July).

Thomas G Fleming and Tasneem Ghazi, '[Parliamentary Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation: Lessons from Comparative Experience](#)' (*The Political Quarterly*, July).

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## Publications to note

Aileen Kavanagh, [The Collaborative Constitution](#) (Cambridge University Press, October).

Philip Norton, [The 1922 Committee: Power Behind the Scenes](#) (Manchester University Press, October).

Jess Sargeant, Steph Coulter, Jack Pannell, Rebecca McKee and Milo Hynes, [Review of the UK Constitution: Final Report](#) (The Bennett Institute for Public Policy and the Institute for Government, September).

Chris Bryant, [Code of Conduct: Why We Need to Fix Parliament – and How to Do It](#) (Bloomsbury, August).

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## Contributors to Monitor 85

Sophie Andrews-McCarroll, Dave Busfield-Birch, James Cleaver, Tom Fleming, Jim Gallagher, Robert Hazell, Lisa James, Rebecca McKee, Alexandra Meakin, Luke Nicholas, Alan Renwick, Meg Russell, Mark Sandford and Alan Whysall.

The issue was edited by Dave Busfield-Birch.

[Read previous issues of Monitor](#)

## New Constitution Unit reports

Click on the images to view each report. A full list of Unit [reports](#) and [projects](#) is available on the Unit website.

