



The Puttnam (Hansard Society) Commission: *Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye*

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The Hansard Society Commission on the Communication of Parliamentary Democracy, chaired by Lord Puttnam, published its report in May 2005. The Commission was created to investigate how Parliament communicates with the wider world and how the public perceives Parliament. The Commission, through 39 recommendations, urged all political parties to commit to a renewal of parliamentary life in an attempt to reinvigorate representative democracy. This Note will provide a summary of the contents of the Puttnam Commission Report along with a sketched backdrop of the factors contributing to the review. It includes an appendix of its recommendations, a summary of some of the debate it sparked within Parliament and then briefly reviews subsequent developments relevant to this area of interest, including a review of its work by the Puttnam Commission.

Contents

A.	Introduction	3
B.	Background to the Puttnam Commission	4
	1. The Work of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons	4
	2. Terms of Reference	5
	3. Members of the Commission	5
	4. Overview of the Report's Recommendations	5
C.	Post-Puttnam Parliamentary Deliberations	8
	1. Immediate Reaction	8
	2. House of Lords Debate, 3 November 2005	10
	3. Westminster Hall debate, 3 November 2005	13
D.	Further Developments	15
	1. House of Commons Commission	15
	2. The Power Inquiry	16
	3. Follow-up evidence sessions by the Modernisation Committee	17
	4. Recent comments by the Leader of the House	18
	5. Review of the Puttnam Commission	18
	Appendix 1: List of recommendations of the Puttnam Commission	22
	Appendix 2: Selected Press Articles	25

Standard Notes are compiled for the benefit of Members of Parliament and their personal staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise others.

A. Introduction

The Commission on the Communication of Parliamentary Democracy, chaired by Lord Puttnam, published its report in May 2005. Although the Hansard Society established the Commission, the inquiry was independent, and the recommendations were not endorsed by the charity. The Report should be viewed against a backdrop of three major concerns for Parliamentarians:

- Firstly, a widely perceived decline of trust and regard held by the public for the UK's institutional arrangements and functions;
- Secondly, and many argue as a reaction to the previous concern, an increasing momentum to modernise the working arrangements of Parliament and the physical environs of Westminster for staff, members and peers, the media, and visitors (a useful overview of the relationship between these first two points is provided by Research Paper 05/46);¹
- And thirdly, a desire to produce a higher standard of information to those outside Westminster.

The link between these three points was made by the former Leader of the House, the late Robin Cook, who wrote:

The health of democracy in Britain is of significance to every person on these isles. Effective democracy in our country is enhanced by the respect of the electorate for the Commons as a Chamber which is effective in holding Government to account, vigilant in the scrutiny of legislation, and competent at adapting itself to contemporary working practices. The objective of modernisation must be to better serve the democracy of Britain and the test of its success must be whether it increases the esteem of the public for their Parliament.²

In the preface to the report, the Chair of the Hansard Society, Lord Holme, observed how the Commission did not solely examine how the media reports parliamentary activity:

It is an enormous strength of this Report, for which I thank Lord Puttnam and his colleagues on the Commission that they do not fall into the easy trap of blaming the messenger, the media in this case, for the lack of enthusiasm and respect for the work of Parliament. It is too easy for Parliamentarians, of whom there were distinguished representatives on the Commission, to rail at the media with the same fury which Caliban vented upon the glass in which he saw himself. The Commission has been forthright in recommending ways, some obvious and overdue and some more visionary and perhaps provocative to traditionalists, in which Parliament could remove the beam from its own eye.³

Lord Puttnam further justified the recommendations of the report by placing them against a wider landscape of declining electoral participation and the perception of an increasing democratic deficit:

¹ RP 05/46 *Modernisation of the House of Commons 1997-2005*. In particular see Part III (E), 'Connecting Parliament with the Public', p43-45

² Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, *Modernisation of the House of Commons: a reform programme for consultation*, 12 December 2001, HC 440, 2001-2002, para 1

³ *Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye*, Hansard Society Commission (Lord Puttnam), 2005, page v

When more than two-thirds of first time voters choose not to use their franchise, when the vote of only one person in 20 is considered significant in determining the outcome of a General Election, and when any Government can achieve power with the support of less than 25 per cent of those eligible to vote, it can only be a matter of time before the legitimacy of our participatory democratic settlement is seriously called into question. In these circumstances it's hard to believe that our present form of parliamentary democracy is sustainable...Our discussions were marked by a total absence of ideological baggage, and were motivated instead by a unanimous desire to place citizens, young and old at the centre of the political food chain, rather than being left to pick up scraps at its fringes.⁴

B. Background to the Puttnam Commission

1. The Work of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons

The Commons Modernisation Select Committee issued a report in June 2004 that touched upon many of the issues to be investigated by the Puttnam Commission. The background to the report was growing concern about the decline in electoral turnout and evidence of disengagement by the public. It noted:

The legitimacy of the House of Commons, as the principal representative body in British democracy, rests upon the support and engagement of the electorate. The decline in political participation and engagement in recent years, as well as in levels of trust in politicians, political parties and the institutions of State should be of concern to every citizen. But it should be of particular concern to the House of Commons.⁵

The conclusions and recommendations of this report are outlined in chapter 1.⁶ The Committee investigated parliamentary connections with young people (chapter 3), the provision of information for the public (chapter 4), for instance the internet and how interactivity could be improved, physical access to the Parliamentary Estate (chapter 5) endorsing the construction of a Visitors Centre, and the report examined the relationship between the House of Commons and the media (chapter 7). It made a series of recommendations to the House of Commons Commission, many of which have been taken up by a group of senior Commons officials, the Group on Information for the Public. The House of Commons Commission responded in detail to the *Connecting Parliament with the Public* Modernisation Committee report in November 2004.⁷

These initiatives are described in more detail in this Note at section D.

⁴ *Ibid.* 'Foreword' page vi-vii. See also <http://www.powerinquiry.org/> For further details see SN/PC/3948 *Power to the People: the report of power, an Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy*

⁵ See for example the annual *Audit of Political Engagement* produced jointly by the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society; the latest (March 2006) is at: http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/assets/Audit_of_Political_Engagement_3.pdf

⁶ HC 368, *Connecting Parliament with the Public, First Report of Session 2003-04*

⁷ *Connecting Parliament with the Public: the House of Commons Commission's Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2003-2004*, HC 69, 2004-05

2. Terms of Reference

The Commission was established to examine the communication of parliamentary democracy and had the following terms of reference:

- To examine the presentation of Parliament and how that presentation is affected by the way it conducts business
- To consider both the effect of Parliament's own procedures and the role of the media in explaining and publicising the work of both houses
- To evaluate the potential for new channels of engagement
- To make recommendations for change⁸

3. Members of the Commission

Chair: Lord Puttnam (former independent film producer)

Vice-chair: Jackie Ashley (journalist and broadcaster)

Patrick Barwise (Professor of Management and Marketing at the London Business School)

Stephen Coleman (Professor of e-democracy at the Oxford Internet Institute)

Matthew d'Ancona (journalist)

Patricia Hodgson (media and Commission for Standards in Public Life)

Raji Hunjan (co-Director of Carnegie Young People Initiative)

Andrew Lansley MP (Conservative; South Cambridgeshire)

Martin Linton MP (Labour; Battersea)

Lord Renton of Mount Harry (former Conservative MP)

Peter Riddell (Chief Political Commentator of *The Times*)

John Sergeant (writer and broadcaster)

Richard Tait (broadcast editor)

Paul Tyler (former Liberal Democrat MP)

Fran Unsworth (BBC's Head of Newsgathering)

David Yelland (Senior Vice-Chair at Weber Shandwick)

Consultant: Yusef Azad

Managing Clerk: Gemma Rosenblatt

Appendix Three of the Commission's Report provides a list of the individuals and organisations that were consulted. In all 70 submissions were made from a wide cross-section of society.⁹ As well as holding evidence sessions the Commission also organised a series of seminars, visits and a public meeting.

4. Overview of the Report's Recommendations

This section provides a brief overview of the report, loosely organised along the main chapters, focusing on the critical issues identified by the Commission and an indication of how the Commission proposes the main concerns should be addressed:

Chapter one provides an overview of why the report was commissioned, linking Parliament's communications activity to the health of democracy:

⁸ *Ibid.* Appendix Two, p96

⁹ See Appendix 3 of the Commission Report for full details

Effective communication from Parliament can only increase understanding and appreciation of its work. Greater transparency will also be an incentive to improve performance in those areas where Parliament is currently failing. For all this to happen, however, Parliament must re-establish its own institutional identity, distinct from Government and the individual MPs and Peers who are its members.¹⁰

The Commission argues that Parliament, lacking any substantial coherent identity, is reliant upon Members to maintain and bolster its powers and independence, explicitly linking improved communication with the public to more effective parliamentary activities:

We believe that a Parliament which involved and engaged the public more effectively in its work would respond to such increased attention with improved performance.¹¹

Chapter two turns its attention to presenting the evidence of public disengagement. It documents declining levels of participation, a poor knowledge of the activities of Parliament, low public satisfaction with its work, a public sense of being ignored by power holders, and a declining media profile. The report further suggests that changing social and political trends have created a divergence between Parliament and society more generally, noting:

British society and politics have changed enormously in the past few decades and there is every reason to believe that most of these trends will continue. But Parliament has simply not kept up. If our representative body becomes an anachronism our democracy suffers. In this section we identify the main social and political trends which challenge the way in which parliament currently operates.¹²

The report then links these changes to the erosion of representative democracy and a decline in the responsiveness of political parties, asserting:

People remain strongly engaged with political, social and ethical issues, but there has been a decline in identification with political parties.¹³

The third chapter of the report turns its attention to the 'essentials of modern communications'. The Commission found Parliament to be in need of a coherent communications strategy, arguing that the key to an effective and responsive democracy is a well informed public, and a public that knows the role of Parliament in governance. The Puttnam Commission summarised this as so:

To meet the rights of the public to accurate and comprehensive information, Parliament requires the same communications resource as that enjoyed by other significant public organisations. Instead of the current diffuse and complex distribution of responsibilities there should be a single communications system, rooted in a department responsible for all aspects of external communications and with a dedicated budget. With these in place, a strategy can be developed which sets out a clear and comprehensive plan to re-engage the public with Parliament's work.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Ibid.* page 2

¹¹ *Ibid.* Paragraph 1.27

¹² *Ibid.* Paragraph 2.25

¹³ *Ibid.* Paragraph 2.25

¹⁴ *Ibid.* page 28

Chapter three ends with a list of seven recommendations, details of which are available in the appendix.

Chapter four outlines possible component elements of the proposed communications strategy, with recommendations pinned back to the several key points that encompass improving, media coverage, encouraging greater citizen participation through the internet, and in engaging young people. The Commission stated:

The strategy should forge a better relationship between Parliament and the media in order to improve coverage for the public; provide a radically enhanced website to allow real involvement in Parliament's work from all sections of society; increase the resources, facilities and opportunities for engagement by young people; encourage a review of how Parliament goes about its work to re-engage the public with Parliament's functions. When fully and consistently applied, the principles of communication outlined in this Report should have an effect at every level of parliamentary life – always placing the emphasis on the rights and interest of the public.¹⁵

At the end of chapter 4, 22 recommendations are outlined.

Before presenting 8 recommendations, chapter five examines the media coverage of Parliament which they claim does not pay enough attention to explanation and information, focusing rather on personality. The report further encourages public service broadcasters to take more responsibility for reporting serious issues more substantially:

Much media coverage of Parliament, when it is covered at all, reveals the same pressures to report splits, sensation and personality, rather than explanation and information, as that of wider political reporting. This is not in the long-term interest either of Parliament or of the media themselves. The reforms to Parliament's communication outlined in this Report, if implemented, would provide a much-needed opportunity for the media to examine their parliamentary reporting and identify those parliamentary news stories which the public have a right to know and a desire to understand.¹⁶

Chapter six examined how Parliament is organised and runs itself and then makes two substantial recommendations. The first chapter of the report summarises the feeling of the Commission with regard to this, criticising what it views as Parliament's weak organisational structure:

An inescapable conclusion of our inquiry has been that Parliament's poor performance in its communications is part of its broader weakness as an organisation. We therefore end with a wider examination of how Parliament conducts its affairs and runs its own administration. We recommend a reform of the House of Commons Commission and the appointment of a Chief Executive for the House of Commons. These reforms will provide the independent political support and

¹⁵ *Ibid.* page 42

¹⁶ *Ibid.* page 72

managerial expertise needed to support a modern Parliament in a fast-changing world.¹⁷

The report ends with a very brief overview of how the recommendations should be implemented, asserting that incremental or piecemeal changes as a response to the report would be inadequate:

Piecemeal or incremental changes as a response to this Report would go against the fundamental conclusions of our work – that the administration of Parliament must be transformed, that the mindset of Parliament has to change to take into account the public's point of view and that communication has to be radically reorganised as a central democratic priority if Parliament is to function effectively. Incremental change alone would mean Parliament drifting ever further out of touch, with consequent damage to our democracy. A new Parliament has an opportunity to pause and consider what it is there for, and what the public has the right to expect of it.

It concludes:

We want to see a Parliament which is an accessible and readily understood institution, which people know how to approach, and when and where to make their voice heard, a Parliament which relates its work to the concerns of those in the outside world. This is the challenge.¹⁸

C. Post-Puttnam Parliamentary Deliberations

This section shall outline the reaction to the Puttnam deliberations in terms of immediate response in the days and weeks after the publication (based on press reports and comments), references made to the Puttnam Commission in Parliamentary proceedings, and also a brief outline of the past work of the Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee on this area.

1. Immediate Reaction

After the report was published, Lord Puttnam used the national press, to call upon Parliament to implement the recommendations of the report fully and immediately:

Parliament has made attempts to improve the manner in which it communicates with the public. But not enough has been done. Indeed, Parliament has been centre-stage when demanding accessibility and transparency from other bodies. Parliament requires far greater accountability. But, more than any other institution, it must itself be wholly accountable. This is where Parliament can genuinely be said to be failing. Some of our proposals cover the details of communication - what the parliamentary website should provide, how to improve lines of communication between the media and Parliament, how visits to Parliament could better operate. The Commission also makes broader recommendations about setting up a communications department in Parliament that brings together these disparate communications activities. It would be all too easy for Parliament, as an institution, to cherry-pick some piecemeal and

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Paragraph 1.37

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Paragraph 7.3

incremental changes from our report. However, we want to create an environment in which the institution can continue to update its communications in line with changes of expectation in society; an institution that does not need prompting in the future and that continues to assess itself from the perspective of the public it exists to serve.¹⁹

In another press article Geoff Hoon, Leader of the House at the time of the publication of the Puttnam Report, welcomed the opportunity for a debate on the future of Parliament, although laid at least some of the responsibility for the decline of respect for Parliament at the door of an increasingly sceptical public:

In conversations on the doorstep during the recent campaign, I found it disturbing that I encountered not just individuals in their 20s who said they would not be voting, but people in their 30s who said they had never voted. This is not simply apathy but a deep alienation. At the same time, however, I recognise that there are no quick fixes to the challenges we all face as parliamentarians. Those who argue that changing the electoral system, providing more TV cameras in the Commons or dropping some of the ceremonial ritual of parliament will help, fail to grasp an essential point. We should not view the challenges facing parliament in isolation from the fundamental changes that are shifting the balance in other elements of society. The decline in deference is on the whole to be welcomed. We live in a more tolerant society with more freedoms and greater rights than was the case in the past. But one of the consequences of this is far less respect in our society - for authority and also for our traditional institutions, including parliament.

He continued:

On the doorsteps, too, I found many people are worried about a general decline in respect for authority. I agree with them. How depressing is it to see younger people swearing at police officers, or parents complaining unreasonably about teachers who have dared to discipline their child? This is sounding an alarm for all of us in civil society. In his report last week Lord Puttnam made the point that there was "an extraordinary confusion" between the role of parliament and the role of government. He argued that people genuinely now see both as one and the same. That is not my experience. We in government have to exercise our duties and responsibilities as the executive. I have always upheld the view that it is parliament's role to hold the executive to account - as I know only too well. In the end, if we are to fundamentally change our society, then there must be a belief that there is "such a thing as society". Parliament is absolutely fundamental to that. The debate about how we in parliament can bring back some of that sense of respect is something I warmly welcome.²⁰

Lord Puttnam responded with an open letter in response to Mr Hoon's comments, a copy of which may be found in the appendix to this Note.

David Yelland, who also sat on the Commission, drew attention to the call for Parliament to have a robust communications strategy, and further emphasised calls for the appointment of Chief Executive for the institution, mirroring the structures found in similar sized organisations:

¹⁹ "We should start the reform of Parliament now", *The Independent*, 24 May 2005, p29. For full article please see Appendix

²⁰ "Comment & Analysis: MPs deserve more respect", *The Guardian*, 3 June 2005, p25. The full text of the comment, and a rebuttal by Lord Puttnam is in the Appendix

This isn't about public relations; it is about communicating, which, increasingly, is at the heart of the way successful organisations function. If you take a look at leading companies, whether they be BP or Tesco, Coca-Cola or British Airways, they all communicate superbly. In most cases, this comes right from the top. Indeed, I would argue that a large part of the role of company chairmen and chief executives is to communicate; it is what leadership is all about. Yet the mother of all Parliaments doesn't have anybody whose job it is to play this role. Contrast that with the press operations at Numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street, government departments, FTSE companies - even sports clubs like Chelsea FC - who all excel in the business of communicating. The commission recommends that this situation be transformed and that Parliament appoints a chief executive whose job it is to run the institution in the interests of parliamentarians and not the government. He or she would report to the House of Commons Commission. Most hospital trusts, district councils and even charities have a chief executive - as well as every company, as a matter of course - but we are still allowing Parliament to operate as if this were the 18th century. Some will accuse us of merely wanting to add to the army of people already employed in government - but the intent here is to counterbalance the power of the executive in the interests of democracy.

Yelland continued his endorsement of the recommendations of the Puttnam Commission highlighting, as he saw it, the complicated and opaque governance of Parliament:

One of the more hilarious tasks that faced us as a commission was trying to construct an organisational chart for the way Parliament actually operates. This was the idea of commissioner Patrick Barwise, chair of management and marketing at the London Business School. What we came up with was a chart detailing total chaos. We then drew up a chart of the kind most companies and effective organisations of all kinds would be familiar with.²¹

2. House of Lords Debate, 3 November 2005

On 3 November 2005 two Parliamentary debates made reference to the Puttnam Commission Report. The first was a debate in the House of Lords on 'Parliament and the Public'²², led by Lord Puttnam himself, and the second was a Westminster Hall debate on the House of Commons Commission Annual Report²³, which occasionally cross referenced the Puttnam Commission.

During the House of Lords debate on the Puttnam Commission, Lord Gould of Brookwood reminded Peers of the fundamental concerns that had prompted the Puttnam Commission Report in the first place:

Politics are, in the first years of the 21st century, becoming a minority sport. The institutions of politics as we know them and often love them — we love them here — their procedures, culture, language and rules, are turning away the public they seek to serve. The game of politics is, by and large, played in the same way by the same

²¹ "Business & Media: Lights, camera - and some action, please: Lord Puttnam last week called for greater media access to Parliament. Former Sun editor David Yelland, who sat on the peer's commission, says more exposure would be good for our democracy", *Observer* [Business Pages], 29 May 2005, p7

²² HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c311 - 367

²³ HC Deb 3 Nov 2005 c335WH-378WH

old rules, but the stadium is increasingly empty and the crowd is melting away. The crisis of political engagement has no single cause, a point which has been made clear in our debate. It flows from the whirlwind of change that has transformed so much in recent years. Globalisation has sucked power upwards, sweeping away the traditional geography of politics. Citizens feel increasingly insecure and disempowered. Consumer expectations have been transformed so that we accept as normal qualities such as choice, quality, responsiveness, consistency, personalisation, and even a measure of control. Traditional institutions have lost their right to unchallenged respect. Trust has to be earned and depends on authenticity, transparency, a moral cause and, increasingly, responsiveness.²⁴

Introducing the debate, Lord Puttnam reported the publication initially received a mixed reaction, before indicating how he believed he was more enthusiastic for reform than his colleagues:

Allow me to put my cards on the table. Having enjoyed the privilege of serving in your Lordships' House for just eight years, I find myself somewhat staggered to discover that my ambitions for Parliament are even greater than Parliament's ambitions for itself. As my granddaughters might say, "How strange is that!"²⁵

Lord Puttnam continued by commending Parliamentary authorities for some recent initiatives (expansion of the Parliamentary Education Unit, the appointment of a new managing editor of the website and the appointment of a new head of the Library and Information Services in the House of Lords). However, he added:

But before anyone gets carried away with enthusiasm, it is worth repeating what we said in the report. The pace and, in some cases, the nature of the changes taking place in society are occurring so rapidly that even our best efforts at incremental change leave us, as the noble Lord, Lord Norton, puts it, running in order to stand still. I would go even further: more often than not, we are actually falling behind public expectations. The problem lies not in our commitment but in our ambition. What is needed is not another round of incremental change, but a step change—and a large step, at that—in the way that Parliament engages with the electorate, especially the younger element of that electorate. By way of example, we have the opportunity to commission the finest resource for public and parliamentary information ever created—a model that every other country would seek to copy. It can be done.²⁶

Lord Puttnam emphasised the recommendations regarding the media and the communications role played by Parliament, urging it to shift from being responsive to the media to being a 'proactive mechanism that seeks to inform and engage interactively and accurately'.²⁷

Lord Holme of Cheltenham, Chairman of the Hansard Society, urged parliamentarians to assume more responsibility for informing the public on the activities of Parliament:

²⁴ HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c346

²⁵ HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c313

²⁶ HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c313

²⁷ HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c315

In the Communications Act we succeeded in getting an amendment to ensure that public service broadcasters have an obligation to promote civic understanding. That standard ought to be applied to Parliament as well. How good are we at promoting civic understanding? It is not enough for us to inform the public about what we do; we must enhance the understanding of what we do, and of democracy itself.²⁸

Not all speakers in the debate were as supportive of the recommendations of the report. Lord Jopling raised concerns over the membership of the Commission before criticising some of the more detailed recommendations of the report:

My first reaction to the report was that it should be seen in the context of the composition of what is called the "commission", although I am not sure of the difference between a commission and a committee. Over half the members of the commission had a media background, whereas less than a third were active parliamentarians, which seemed somewhat skewed. Rather like a referendum if you know the answer you want you can pitch the question to get it. I suspect there might be just a little bit of that here. I understand why the media always press for greater access and transparency. It is only natural in this commission with this membership that many of the proposals are slanted for exactly that. We need to assess the report both in terms of what the media want and what is best for the system of parliamentary government. Those two things do not always fit together.²⁹

Lord Howarth of Newport said Parliament had to make more effort to inform the public on the basic principles of British governance yet also warned that better communication would not necessarily lead to an increased the popularity of legislators:

But members of the commission, who are sensible people, will not have been starry-eyed about how much all this can achieve. How far will the public make a distinction between Parliament as an institution, politics, the political parties, political personalities and the Government? I suspect that, in the public understanding, Parliament is a shorthand term for politics in Westminster—for what goes on in the parliamentary bear pit and thereabouts. If Parliament as an institution fails to do a good job, no amount of public relations will convince our sceptical citizens that the institution is in good health. The Welsh Assembly has put into practice many of the policies that the commission recommends for us, but I am not yet aware that the communications strategy of the Welsh Assembly has kindled a love affair between the people of Wales and their Assembly. And I would be wary if we were to proliferate communications professionals in this place—a few, yes, but good ones are very hard to find.³⁰

Lord Howarth continued:

Parliament is always in the thick of a variety of power struggles. How those are played out will more powerfully condition perceptions of Parliament than any public relations strategy that Parliament may adopt. Parliament is, after all, the principal arena in which the competing interests and aspirations of our people are expressed and resolved, and the processes whereby that occurs are mainly humdrum, complex and lengthy. It is very hard to see how they can be presented appealingly. If, as the

²⁸ HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c320

²⁹ HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c327

³⁰ HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c334

commission proposes, we are to have a review of procedures with a view to improving Parliament's capacity to communicate, then I think we should be very careful that we do not so simplify and truncate procedures that we throw the baby out with the bathwater, that we weaken scrutiny, that we enable the Government too easily to have their way and that we facilitate bad legislation. Parliament is often turbulent, and that provides drama and stories which the media relish. The public reaction is mixed: they are both fascinated and appalled by the clash and noise of lively parliamentary proceedings.³¹

In summing up the deliberations, Baroness Amos, Leader of the House of Lords and Lord President of the Council, broadly welcomed the report and the opportunity it provided for further informed debate. She did, however, point out that responsibility for taking the initiative for reform lay not with the Government, but with Members of both Houses:

In conclusion, the report rightly points out that clear political leadership is essential if change is to be achieved. The House authorities can assist us in providing opportunities for our work to become more accessible and open to the general public. But they are not responsible for those decisions and they cannot be the sole drivers for change. I would like to propose that we refer all the proposals made today to the relevant committees for consideration. I would be very happy to look back over the debate, consider the suggestions that have been made and perhaps place one or two sides of A4 in the Library making it clear to which committee each suggestion or recommendation has been referred. I was a little surprised that, at the same time as participants in the debate were extolling the importance of the independence of Parliament and that it was seen as separate from government, from the Executive, it is government who are being pressed to bring about the changes proposed in the report. If Parliament is to communicate effectively and engage fully with the public that it serves, the leadership must come from its Members. That is a challenge for all of us, collectively. It will require time, energy, co-operation and good will. If it is to happen, let us be honest with ourselves.³²

3. Westminster Hall debate, 3 November 2005

On the same day of the debate in the House of Lords, a Westminster Hall debate was held on the annual report of the House of Commons Commission.³³ The House of Commons Commission, established by the *House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978*, examines the governance and administrative arrangements of the House and outlines plans for the future development of services across all services and departments. Further details on the House of Commons Commission are available from its webpages.³⁴ It has responsibility for, amongst other things, the communication strategy of Parliament. In the debate some mention was made both of the Puttnam Report and the parallel Lords debate.

The then Leader of the House of Commons, Geoff Hoon, made links between the work of the Modernisation Committee and the recommendations of the Puttnam Commission:

³¹ HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c334-335

³² HL Deb 3 Nov 2005 c364-365

³³ Twenty-seventh Annual Report from the House of Commons Commission, HC 65, Session 2004–05 available online at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmcomm/65/6501.htm>

³⁴ http://www.parliament.uk/about_commons/house_of_commons_commission_.cfm

...there has been another report that links in with that, namely that of the Hansard Society Commission on "Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye", which was led by Lord Puttnam. Coincidentally, that report is being debated in the other place today, and may yet feature in the remarks of other contributors to the debate; I am certainly interested to hear what colleagues have to say about it. The report stated that the need to reform the website was a constant theme in the evidence that it had received, and it echoed the Modernisation Committee's call for radical reform of the site. I am delighted, therefore, that the Commission is seriously considering that issue and working on a radical redesign project on a bicameral basis, led by our new Librarian John Pullinger. The Modernisation Committee report also recommended some expansion of the House's communications team; I note that there has been a limited expansion in that area. The need for close thought to be given to communications and work with the media was a central theme of the Puttnam report. Of course, there is scope for wide debate about the recommendations. It may be unduly simplistic to talk in terms of a single communications strategy for Parliament, as the report does, when we are by our very nature, and quite correctly, an amalgam of opposing interests. However, I - and, I am sure, other members of the Commission - will be interested to hear what colleagues here today have to say on that.³⁵

Chris Grayling, then shadow Leader of the House of Commons, added his support to the Commission's endorsement of the Parliamentary Education Unit's work with schools:

The Puttnam commission's recommendation to ensure that we educate young people better about the workings of Parliament is extremely valuable. It contains some good ideas that merit further discussion by the Commission and by hon. Members generally. I echo the compliments paid to the education service, which is our front line in ensuring that we have high-quality information for young people.³⁶

Martin Linton who served on the Puttnam Commission, referred to the broadcasting of proceedings by BBC Parliament saying:

The Modernisation Committee supported, more or less, a new communications department. The parliamentary website should be interactive. I know that in many ways, that would be a hostage to fortune, but sooner or later, we must grapple with the fact that Parliament is here to be interactive with the electorate, so our website should be interactive. The remit of BBC Parliament should be broadened. At the moment, when there is a Division, nothing happens for that 15 minutes: people watch practically a blank screen. That is because the BBC feels that it is not allowed to interview anybody or explain anything because it has to report what is said and nothing else. However, if there were more flexibility, people might start to find the parliamentary channel quite interesting.³⁷

He further commented upon the more general recommendations of the Puttnam Commission regarding reform of administrative practices:

³⁵ HC Deb 3 Nov 2005 c343WH

³⁶ HC Deb 3 Nov 2005 c347WH

³⁷ HC Deb 3 Nov 2005 c351WH

Most controversially, the Hansard Society Commission recommended that the House of Commons Commission be elected by secret ballot. I do not know what members of the Commission present think of that, but as we are all elected by secret ballot, I cannot think of what they would have to fear. Lastly, it was recommended that the House of Commons be headed by a chief executive who is experienced in the management of complex organisations in the public realm. Hon. Members will be aware that we have a chief executive role: the Clerk of the House is the chief executive under the Braithwaite reforms, but what was envisaged was a dedicated post of chief executive, rather than someone who has that role in addition to the onerous duties of the Clerk of the House.³⁸

Subsequent to the Westminster Hall debate, Nick Harvey, spokesman for the House of Commons Commission, wrote a letter to those attending to respond to some of the key points raised, particularly those from Martin Linton.³⁹

D. Further Developments

This section outlines the most important recent developments of specific relation to the Puttnam Commission or that comment upon or refer to elements of the recommendations of the Commission Report.

1. House of Commons Commission

The 2005/06 House of Commons Commission Annual Report states:

Members as elected representatives have primary responsibility for maintaining links between Parliament and the public, but there are areas where an impartial House Service can and should support this by making the work and role of Parliament better understood.⁴⁰

The Report goes on to note how, after the June 2004 Modernisation Report, *Connecting Parliament with the Public*, the Group on Information for the Public, on behalf of the Board of Management, became responsible for taking action on the Committee's recommendations.

Key recommendations on which progress has been made include:

- two additional staff posts in the Education Unit, to focus on outreach to young people and liaison with local education authorities;
- an extension of the Education Unit's autumn visits programme to provide year-round visits to Parliament for young people. These will start in October 2006;
- the production of a new voters' guide to be sent to all young people on or around their eighteenth birthday, from mid-2006 onwards;
- the production of a pilot weekly newsletter, "Commons Knowledge", aimed at the non-specialist reader, summarising forthcoming business, made available both in print and electronic form;
- the establishment of a Media and Communications Service for the House of Commons to take a more proactive role in promoting the House and its work;

³⁸ HC Deb 3 Nov 2005 c351WH

³⁹ Available online <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/WestHallDeblet05.pdf>

⁴⁰ House of Commons Commission – *Twenty-eighth Annual Report, 2004-2005*, Paragraph 121

- an upgrading of the Parliament website, with significant investment in systems and staff;
- online publication of the Hansard report of proceedings in the Chamber throughout the day⁴¹

The 2004-05 House of Commons Commission Report similarly notes areas where progress had been made in the previous year.⁴²

The House of Commons Commission responded to the Report from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons referred to above.⁴³ Also of interest may be the House of Commons Strategic Plan⁴⁴, which outlines proposals for the development of House services over the coming five years.

In May 2005 the House of Commons Library produced a Standard Note that accounts for the work of the Library in improving access to information for the public.⁴⁵ It is also useful as an overview of the services the Library and the House provide in terms of education, information enquiries, publications, media and communications, parliamentary broadcasting and webcasting, the website and the physical facilities for those visiting Parliament.

2. The Power Inquiry

Of additional interest is the recent publication of the Power Inquiry, *Power to the People*, which was an independent inquiry into the nature of British democracy, chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy. Amongst other things the Power Inquiry recommended:

25. The rules on the plurality of media ownership should be reformed. This is always a controversial issue but there should be special consideration given to this issue in light of the developments in digital broadcast and the internet;

and;

26. A requirement should be introduced that public service broadcasters develop strategies to involve viewers in deliberation on matters of public importance – this would be aided by the use of digital technology.

A detailed Standard Note on the Power Inquiry is on the Library website.⁴⁶

⁴¹ House of Commons Commission – *Twenty-eighth Annual Report*, 2004-2005, Paragraph 142

⁴² House of Commons Commission – *Twenty-seventh Annual Report*, 2004-2005, Paragraph 121

⁴³ *Connecting Parliament with the Public: the House of Commons commission's Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2003-2004*, HC 69, 2004-05

⁴⁴ *House of Commons Commission: Strategic Plan*

http://www.parliament.uk/about_commons/house_of_commons_commission_/strategicplan05.cfm

⁴⁵ SN/PC/3359, *House of Commons: providing information and access for the public*

http://pims.parliament.uk:81/PIMS/Static%20Files/Extended%20File%20Scan%20Files/LIBRARY_OTHER_PAPERS/STANDARD_NOTE/snpc-03359.pdf

⁴⁶ SN 3948, *Power to the People: the report of Power, an Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy*;

http://pims.parliament.uk:81/PIMS/Static%20Files/Extended%20File%20Scan%20Files/LIBRARY_OTHER_PAPERS/STANDARD_NOTE/snpc-03948.pdf

3. Follow-up evidence sessions by the Modernisation Committee

The Modernisation Committee has been conducting some follow-up evidence sessions on their report, *Connecting Parliament with the Public*,⁴⁷ which is of interest to the work of the Puttnam Commission. For instance, Lord Adonis, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Skills and Government Spokesperson for Education and Skills, when invited to give evidence referred on several occasions to the Puttnam Report, which he described as a 'valuable piece of work'⁴⁸, remarked upon the Report's recommendation to improve accessibility to and navigation of the website.⁴⁹ The Committee gathered evidence on 29 March 2006 from Lord Puttnam himself as well as from Claire Ettinghausen, Director of the Hansard Society, and Andrew Lansley MP, and Dame Patricia Hodgson, both of whom were Members of the Puttnam Commission. The session generated a lengthy and quite detailed discussion of the nature of British politics, including the relationship between Members and the public and the division of powers between Parliament and Government. Claire Ettinghausen's comments in response to a question from a member of the Committee may be used to summarise the complexity of this discussion and in illustrating the wide range of issues under deliberation:

Q53 Sir Nicholas Winterton: Do people not say to you, "We don't bother to vote because we do not believe it matters any longer because our Members of Parliament are no longer free to do what he or she believes is right?" Do you not believe that this is one of the problems, that people no longer trust Members of Parliament? If that is the case—and I personally believe it is the case and you say that it is not the reality but, even if it is not the reality, it is what people perceive—how can we reverse that? How can we redress that?

Ms Ettinghausen: If we had a discussion about why people do not vote, we might be here for another few years! There are many, many reasons for that. I think, as Andrew said before, there is a difference between people's perception of their own individual MP, which is quite favourable, versus MPs and politics and Parliament as a class, if you like. What we are trying to do is to find ways to bridge that difference and try to get people to be more familiar with Parliament and the political process in order that they can understand that there is this kind of independence, there are MPs with independent minds, there is a great deal of work that goes on in committees and there is a great deal of work that individual MPs do beyond going through the lobbies. I think there is this gap between the public understanding, as I think was said before, in that they understand surgeries and they understand Prime Minister's Questions, but the bits in between are not there. It is largely the fault of the media but there is some role that Parliament can play in making that more accessible to the media. One of the things that one of the political editors said to us was that they are sold stories all the time, they are sold stories, stories, stories, and what they are sold from Parliament is lists and it is no wonder that there is that difference.⁵⁰

The full transcript of the session may be browsed online.⁵¹

⁴⁷ HC 368, Session 2003-04

⁴⁸ Modernisation of the House of Commons Committee, Minutes of Evidence, HC 951-i, 1 March 2006; question 2. Available online <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmmodern/951/6030101.htm>

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Question 22

⁵⁰ Modernisation of the House of Commons Committee – Minutes of Evidence, HC 951-ii, 29 March 2006, Question 53

⁵¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmmodern/951/6032901.htm>

4. Comments by the Leader of the House- June 2006

In a recent speech to the Fabian Society Jack Straw, current Leader of the House of Commons, implied that he believed the Puttnam recommendations should be implemented more fully, whilst at the same time recognising the advances made over the past number of years:

The Hansard Society's Commission last year under Lord Puttnam contained some very important recommendations on how Parliament, especially the Commons, better communicates what it is doing and why. Some are being implemented, but I hope to play my part in pushing for faster and more thorough implementation, especially the recommendations about much more extensive education in citizenship and Parliament's role in delivering that. Important changes made by Robin Cook and Peter Hain as Leader of the House, such as the development of a Visitors' Centre, are literally opening up the Palace of Westminster, and are long overdue.⁵²

He also briefly referenced the Puttnam Commission in a recent speech organised by the Hansard Society, perhaps suggesting further reform will come in the future. Welcoming some recent developments he added:

But Parliament as an institution has not undergone the same transformation in terms of its contact with the public. In many ways, it remains trapped in a time-warp – using language and procedures that appear alien to outsiders. Maybe they always were, but people couldn't see it in the past. Television coverage means that light has been shone into those dark corners that were once guarded by mystery. Ironically, by opening them up to the world outside, these arcane procedures have the effect of making Westminster appear a closed institution...The truth is that Parliament has a good message to tell – but it needs to be a great deal better at telling it.⁵³

5. Review of the Puttnam Commission

The Hansard Society conducted a review of the Puttnam Commission in November 2006 which included a review report and a half day conference in Parliament on 2 November.

The review report, *Parliament in the Public Eye 2006: Coming into Focus?*⁵⁴, provides an overview of developments since 2005, alongside comment from influential figures directly involved in the process of change. In his introduction, Lord Puttnam welcomes the progress made so far:

Since our report was published, Parliament has made some significant improvements to a number of aspects of its communication strategy and practice. In fact, there is a

⁵² 'The future for democracy- politics in a spectator society', speech by Jack Straw to the Fabian Society, 28 June 2006

⁵³ The full text of this document is available online at:
http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/assets/Hansard_society_speech.pdf

⁵⁴ *Parliament in the Public Eye 2006: Coming into Focus?*, Hansard Society Commission (Lord Puttnam), 2006

sense that an overall cultural change has begun to take place within Parliament as a whole.⁵⁵

However, he cautions that:

...a number of other recommendations have yet to be implemented... This includes, in particular, a review of the House of Commons administration (the “Braithwaite arrangements”). The terms of reference chosen for this review will be crucial in determining whether many of the Commission’s recommendations relating to the administration and management of Parliament will fall within its remit.⁵⁶

Responding, Jack Straw reflects on some of the advances already made:

A more relaxed regime for broadcasters in the Commons and Lords is being trialled; media advisers for select committees have helped to increase coverage of that side of Parliament’s work; visitors to the building now receive a better welcome following the appointment of visitor assistants; work is advanced on a proper reception centre for visitors (alongside Westminster Hall); plans for a dedicated educational visitor centre are being discussed ; a *New Voters’ Guide* has been distributed to new electors; new outreach officers are developing links with every secondary school in the country; and the parliamentary website is undergoing a major redesign.⁵⁷

In Chapter 2, Claire Ettinghausen, Chief Executive of the Hansard Society, reinforces Lord Puttnam’s observations on the need to quicken the pace of organisational change within Parliament, noting in particular that the Commission’s recommendation that a single communications department should be established has yet to be formally considered.⁵⁸ Continuing on the theme of the organisation of parliamentary administration, John Pullinger, Librarian of the House of Commons, emphasises the importance of the changes made to the House of Commons Group on Information for the Public (GIP):

In recognition of the increasing emphasis on Parliament-wide communications, the Clerks of both Houses agreed that House of Lords representation on GIP should be increased to include a member of the House of Lords management board...as well as the House of Lords Director of Communications. They also agreed that the Chair of GIP should be a member of the House of Commons board of management...These were significant decisions. They recognised the need to take a more strategic approach to communications but also the value of drawing on the communications expertise which rests within each of the departments across both Houses.⁵⁹

In Chapter 3, Greg Hurst, Honorary Secretary of the Parliamentary Press Gallery and political correspondent for *The Times*, considers the response of MPs to the Puttnam Commission’s recommendations and how this response might have been shaped by the membership of the Commission itself:

⁵⁵ Ibid, “Introduction”, page 6

⁵⁶ Ibid, “Introduction”, page 7

⁵⁷ Ibid, Chapter 1, page 12

⁵⁸ Ibid, Chapter 2, page 14

⁵⁹ Ibid, Chapter 2, page 21

The Puttnam Commission's report rightly picked up on the hostility frequently displayed towards parliamentary journalists, which comes from both Members of Parliament and some of its officials... Curiously, given the impeccable credentials of the journalists who sat on the Puttnam Commission, some of its conclusions may, inadvertently or not, have played into this cocktail of resentment and hostility...It was not wise, in my view, to be so prescriptive in several of the report's recommendations on matters both small and large, given the jealousy with which MPs guard their right of Parliamentary privilege...MPs bridle at the impression of being told how to run their affairs by outsiders of any kind, particularly so by senior and powerful members of the media.⁶⁰

In Chapter 4, Virginia Gibbons, Communications Manager of the Hansard Society, examines the impact of the Puttnam Commission's recommendations on media reporting of Parliament. While welcoming some of the steps taken by Parliament to forge a better relationship with the media (such as a relaxation of the rules on broadcasting proceedings of the House and additional media officers for select committees), Gibbons also notes that:

Some recommendations of the Puttnam Commission have made little or no progress – photographers are banned from the Chamber, passes for media outlets remain restricted – whilst others (the establishment of an advisory group of media representatives, formal induction for journalists) are being considered.⁶¹

Commenting on recommendations made by the Puttnam Commission in relation to the role of Public Service Broadcasting in promoting Parliament, Gibbons identifies areas where decent progress has been made:

One welcome development has been on BBC Radio 4's *You and Yours* programme, which encourages listeners to submit evidence to parliamentary committees via the programme – an admirable example of Parliament and the BBC working together to engage the public in the political process.⁶²

In light of the Puttnam Commission's calls for BBC Parliament to show more flexibility in its parliamentary coverage, Gibbons reports that some changes are imminent:

The Commission also called for the remit of BBC Parliament to be broadened to permit the live coverage of other noteworthy parliamentary proceedings. The rules at the time dictated the House of Commons should always be broadcast live when sitting, even if the most noteworthy event of the day was being held in the Lords or in committee...Following a request to the Speaker, Michael Martin MP, it has been agreed that BBC Parliament will be released on a trial basis from the undertaking to carry live Commons Chamber coverage, on condition that the freedom to select proceedings in the Lords is used only sparingly, and that the Speaker should be consulted in such cases⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid, Chapter 3, pages 30-31

⁶¹ Ibid, Chapter 4, page 34

⁶² Ibid, Chapter 4, page 37

⁶³ Ibid, Chapter 4, page 38

In the conclusion to *Parliament in the Public Eye 2006: Coming into Focus?*, Jackie Ashley, Vice-chair of the Puttnam Commission, summarises the Commission's view of recent developments:

Eighteen months on (from the publication of *Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye*), we are heartened by the progress that has been made towards implementing many of the Commission's recommendations. In particular, we welcome the House of Commons Strategic Plan for 2006-2011, as well as the publication of the first ever corporate business plan for the House of Commons. The Group on Information for the Public (GIP) is taking the first vital steps towards raising awareness of communications issues among MPs and staff. It promises the House of Commons Media and Communications Service will provide a professional media service for journalists and will promote a better understanding of the work of the House and its committees⁶⁴

However, while highlighting some evidence of "a more general cultural change"⁶⁵, towards connecting Parliament with the public, Ashley regrets that:

...parliamentarians have not responded to calls for the language and terminology used, along with some of the archaic procedures, to be changed. Nor have they acknowledged a failure to hold topical debates or increase the number of committee meetings outside London. The Westminster Village seems determined to remain just that: a small village which does not welcome outsiders. It is certainly not an outward looking community, seeking to interest and engage with the people beyond its walls – the voters.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid, "Conclusion", page 44

⁶⁵ Ibid, "Conclusion", page 45

⁶⁶ Ibid, "Conclusion", page 46

Appendix 1: List of recommendations of the Puttnam Commission⁶⁷

Report Recommendations

We urge all political parties to commit themselves to a renewal of British parliamentary life. The long-term gains for our democracy will be immense.

We believe a Parliament that involves and engages the public more effectively in its work, and where the public can exercise real influence, would respond to such increased attention with improved performance.

Parliament is currently failing in its democratic duty. Its organisation, procedures and general ethos are now seriously out of date. It has failed, in particular, to respond adequately to the opportunities provided by modern communications and in doing so has contributed to the growing alienation of the British public. Parliament may be serving its members more effectively, but there is yet to be a matching improvement in the service it provides to the public. Parliament needs to reassert itself, to reconnect with the public and become what it has always striven to be – the fountain of our democratic freedoms.

In order to achieve this, we make the following recommendations:

The Essentials of Modern Communications

- R1 A Communications Service should be established for Parliament, bringing together within its departmental remit the various communication activities essential to a contemporary democratic institution [3.8]
- R2 A single Joint Committee of both Houses should be established, responsible for communication matters, though MPs or Peers should be able to consider separately matters solely relevant to their respective Houses [3.14]
- R3 A communication strategy for Parliament should be adopted, having been arrived at through a wide-reaching and open process of consultation with parliamentarians, the media, the public and other interested bodies [3.28]
- R4 The communication strategy should take Parliament at least to 2010 with provision for a mid-term review, and it should be based on the optimum principles of accessibility and transparency; participation and responsiveness; accountability; inclusiveness; and best practice in management and communication [3.29]
- R5 The communication strategy should be tabled for agreement by both Houses [3.30]
- R6 The communication strategy will require regular reporting back to MPs and Peers, annual evaluation against targets, and provision for the public to participate in the evaluation process [3.31]
- R7 The communication strategy must be accompanied by the necessary and long-term budgetary commitment from the parliamentary authorities. [3.37]

Elements of a Communication Strategy

- R8 A new Communications Department should set up an advisory group of media representatives [4.6]
- R9 Parliamentary officials should do much more to draw the media's attention explicitly to matters of public interest [4.12]

⁶⁷ From pages x – xiii of the Report

- R10 The rules of television coverage in the chambers should be relaxed to allow, for example, appropriate reaction shots, the relevant use of close-ups, more panning shots of the backbenches and a greater range of coverage during divisions. It should be an explicit objective of parliamentary coverage to not just inform but to interest and engage the viewer [4.20]
- R11 There should be a relaxation of the rules for filming in the precincts of Parliament, permission for walking shots, interviews with relevant persons other than MPs, and a wider interpretation of parliamentary subject-matter which genuinely reflects the richness of political activity taking place at any one time within Parliament [4.23]
- R12 The ban on still photographs should be reconsidered in light of the communication principles set out above [4.24]
- R13 The current restrictions on the number of passes available for media outlets should be reconsidered [4.26]
- R14 The parliamentary authorities should provide regular, formal induction for journalists [4.27]
- R15 A new Communications Department should establish effective processes to manage, edit, develop and continually update the parliamentary website [4.30]
- R16 The parliamentary website should be radically improved. At a minimum, it should be consultative, interactive and easily navigable [4.43]
- R17 An improved website should engage the widest range of citizens, using well-designed publicity and targeted advertising to help people understand that there is a virtual route through which they have easy access to their Parliament [4.44]
- R18 Parliament should consider its role in consistently developing citizenship education resources and the different curriculum approaches across the UK. It should work closely with other organisations to support more training for teachers, and more and better materials for young people [4.50]
- R19 Parliament's facilities, including the chambers, should be made available during recess for groups of young people [4.53]
- R20 Parliament should take young people, including pre-voting citizens, far more seriously by involving them in its processes and decision-making [4.54]
- R21 In line with recent joint recommendations from the Accommodation and Works Committee and Administration Committee, the Parliamentary Education Unit should have a well resourced and dedicated teaching space with multi-media facilities [4.61]
- R22 Parliament should employ more full-time and contracted staff who are fully trained and experienced in working with young people in a range of different settings [4.62]
- R23 A young persons' consultative group should be established with the right to attend and advise at key administrative meetings of both Houses [4.62]
- R24 More should be done to enhance the effectiveness of parliamentary outreach work [4.63]
- R25 There should be a thorough review of the language and terminology Parliament uses in accordance with our communication principles [4.69]
- R26 Parliament should hold more meetings outside London. Select committees, for example, should hold more formal proceedings and public events beyond Westminster [4.73–4.74]
- R27 All parliamentary procedures should be comprehensively reassessed from the perspective of the communication principles we have advocated [4.75]
- R28 Parliament should revisit and implement the recommendations on topical debates put forward both by the Hansard Society Commission on Parliamentary Scrutiny (the 'Newton Commission') and by the Liaison Committee [4.78]

- R29 The authorities in Parliament as they appoint staff, and the political parties as they select candidates, should recognise the need for greater diversity if Parliament is to function well. [4.79]

Media Coverage of Parliament

- R30 A radical reform of parliamentary communication and presentation should provide an opportunity for the media to enhance their coverage of parliamentary business [5.12]
- R31 There should be a renewed commitment by the commercial public service broadcasters to provide national and regional news and current affairs [5.16]
- R32 We encourage all public service broadcasters to increase the quality and amount of political programming, particularly that designed to meet the needs of young people [5.20]
- R33 The BBC must be required by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and by Parliament to be explicit as to how it plans to report Parliament in an engaging, innovative and accessible way as part of its contribution to 'democratic value' [5.25]
- R34 There should be greater integration between BBC Parliament and the broader spectrum BBC programming to improve cross trailing [5.27]
- R35 Given the availability of webcasting of all parliamentary proceedings, the remit of BBC Parliament should be broadened to permit the live coverage of other noteworthy parliamentary hearings or debates [5.30]
- R36 The 'democratic value' principles contained in the BBC's own Charter Renewal document imply the need for a significant increase in resources to BBC Parliament. BBC Parliament remains a seriously undervalued democratic and broadcasting resource, with immense potential to provide innovative parliamentary programming. The BBC should, in the coming months, provide a clear and substantial action plan for its development, and for a targeted and ambitious increase in its impact [5.31]
- R37 Resources for BBC Parliament should not be at the expense of effective funding for high quality public service broadcasting on the main BBC channels. The BBC should continue to provide parliamentary coverage across the full range of its output, where it has the power to reach mass audiences. [5.32]

How Parliament Runs Itself

- R38 We believe Parliament will communicate its own messages confidently and effectively only when it is administered independently of frontbench influence. We therefore propose that legislation be enacted to provide for the House of Commons Commission to be elected by secret ballot, with members of each party voting for a proportionate number of Commission members from among their number [6.6]
- R39 We recommend that the administration of the House of Commons be headed by a Chief Executive, experienced in the management of complex organisations in the public realm, reporting directly to the House of Commons Commission. [6.11]

Appendix 2: Selected Press Articles

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The Independent (London)

May 24, 2005, Tuesday

SECTION: First Edition; COMMENT; Pg. 29

LENGTH: 766 words

HEADLINE: WE SHOULD START THE REFORM OF PARLIAMENT NOW

BYLINE: DAVID PUTTNAM

BODY:

Given up on democracy? Or are you waiting for electoral change to reinvigorate the public in - maybe - 4, or even 8 years time?

Well, electoral reform is one way to sway the nature of government power and parliamentary democracy in this country. It could deliver the hope of reinvigorated politics and - not just increased - but genuinely engaged turn-out.

But shouldn't we be more impatient than that? Why should we be made to wait for Parliament to improve its relationship with the public when, in reality, many of those changes can be introduced today?

We should start from what the public have a right to expect from Parliament. The public have a right to know exactly what's happening, as well as a right to participate. The public should be able to understand proceedings, to contribute to inquiries and to access all forms of information about Parliament. Parliament cannot fulfil its purpose if people cannot understand what Parliament does, or why it does it.

As Chair of the Commission on Parliament in the Public Eye, I have been looking at how Parliament presents itself, and is presented by others, to the public. Since the Commission was set up by the Hansard Society in 2004, we have looked closely at how Parliament conducts its communications. We concluded significant change is needed.

Parliament has made attempts to improve the manner in which it communicates with the public. But not enough has been done. Indeed, Parliament has been centre-stage when demanding accessibility and transparency from other bodies. Parliament requires far greater accountability. But, more than any other institution, it must itself be wholly accountable. This is where Parliament can genuinely be said to be failing.

Some of our proposals cover the details of communication - what the parliamentary website should provide, how to improve lines of communication between the media and Parliament, how visits to Parliament could better operate. The Commission also makes broader recommendations about setting up a communications department in Parliament that brings together these disparate communications activities.

It would be all too easy for Parliament, as an institution, to cherry-pick some piecemeal and

incremental changes from our report. However, we want to create an environment in which the institution can continue to update its communications in line with changes of expectation in society; an institution that does not need prompting in the future and that continues to assess itself from the perspective of the public it exists to serve.

For this to be achieved, we recommend fundamental changes to the administration and management of Parliament. The failings in Parliament's communication with the public stem from a system of administration which is able to provide neither political nor managerial leadership. Parliament must communicate with the public as an independent institution, distinct from the Executive. It should take control of its own affairs. And parliamentarians should themselves provide clear political vision and direction for this.

June 3, 2005

SECTION: Guardian Leader Pages, Pg. 25

LENGTH: 754 words

HEADLINE: Comment & Analysis: MPs deserve more respect

BYLINE: Geoff Hoon

BODY:

Parliament is facing a crisis of respect. We need to communicate better. We need to educate young people about the importance and relevance of the two houses. And as someone who has not always seen eye to eye with our great British media, I would certainly agree that we need to encourage more and better reporting of the detail of our business.

I hope to have discussions with newspaper editors and senior journalists on why they have abandoned coverage of what happens in the Commons chamber. Perhaps with the government's relatively smaller majority, some will recognise the importance of parliamentary debate. Meanwhile, we as a parliament need to scrutinise better what the European commission and its commissioners are planning.

A key challenge for all of us in politics who wish to improve the standing of parliament must be to demonstrate in the clearest terms that the decisions we take during our proceedings have a direct impact on the lives of the people we represent.

Since I took on my new role as leader of the House of Commons after the general election, I have made a point of meeting as many new members as possible from all sides of the house. Their energy, breadth of experience and commitment to public service are striking.

There is a popular myth that MPs should be regarded as a bunch of second-raters who are in it for what they can get. This is grossly unfair, but it is worrying that people think it.

MPs are uniquely placed to inform the government of how policies have an impact on the ground, where it makes a difference.

Many of us are concerned with the apparent alienation that people feel from the political process. Despite the increase in numbers voting at the May general election, the trend towards a lower turnout is a real concern.

In conversations on the doorstep during the recent campaign, I found it disturbing that I encountered not just individuals in their 20s who said they would not be voting, but people in their 30s who said they had never voted. This is not simply apathy but a deep alienation.

At the same time, however, I recognise that there are no quick fixes to the challenges we all face as parliamentarians. Those who argue that changing the electoral system, providing more TV cameras in the Commons or dropping some of the ceremonial ritual of parliament will help, fail to grasp an essential point. We should not view the challenges facing parliament in isolation from the fundamental changes that are shifting the balance in other elements of society.

The decline in deference is on the whole to be welcomed. We live in a more tolerant society with more freedoms and greater rights than was the case in the past. But one of the consequences of this is far less respect in our society - for authority and also for our traditional institutions, including parliament.

The right to vote in a parliamentary democracy is a hard-won privilege. For me, it is a vital part of the way we bind together our society, whatever the decision of the voters.

To encourage disrespect for parliament, as some in the media have done in the absence of a real parliamentary opposition, risks fostering a deeper malaise. Certainly the media have an important role to play - scrutinising, questioning, satirising - but in a way that does not fundamentally damage respect for all of our institutions.

On the doorsteps, too, I found many people are worried about a general decline in respect for authority. I agree with them. How depressing is it to see younger people swearing at police officers, or parents complaining unreasonably about teachers who have dared to discipline their child? This is sounding an alarm for all of us in civil society.

In his report last week Lord Puttnam made the point that there was "an extraordinary confusion" between the role of parliament and the role of government. He argued that people genuinely now see both as one and the same. That is not my experience.

We in government have to exercise our duties and responsibilities as the executive. I have always upheld the view that it is parliament's role to hold the executive to account - as I know only too well.

In the end, if we are to fundamentally change our society, then there must be a belief that there is "such a thing as society". Parliament is absolutely fundamental to that. The debate about how we in parliament can bring back some of that sense of respect is something I warmly welcome.

June 6, 2005

SECTION: Guardian Leader Pages, Pg. 19

LENGTH: 852 words

HEADLINE: Comment & Analysis: Once, you'd have risen to this challenge: So, you want the public to show parliament more respect? An open letter to Geoff Hoon

BYLINE: David Puttnam

BODY:

Dear Geoff,

I read your piece on these pages last week with a curious mixture of approval, disappointment and ultimately puzzlement.

Top marks for the first few paragraphs, which accurately identify the depth and seriousness of the problems associated with electoral disengagement. But your advisers should have pointed you in the direction of the 39 perfectly sensible recommendations contained in our report.

For example your argument regarding inaccurate perceptions of MPs is well supported in para 2.12 (page 17) of our report, where we set out evidence of the paradox that results in the unfair generalisations about which you justifiably complain.

Like you, we make it absolutely clear that there are no quick fixes.

Clearly you weren't referring to our report when you castigate those who believe that a few more cameras and less ritual will deliver much needed change. As a former barrister you'll know better than most that tilting at windmills in preference to wrestling with the results of uncomfortable evidence is no way to solve the urgent problems you identify.

Having read the report, you will know that it makes no reference whatsoever to the "ritual" of either house. The idea that our report wants to do away with the ceremonial is, ironically enough, an example of exactly the type of media invention that troubles you.

Having fretted over these issues for 18 months, I was delighted to hear that you had been appointed to your present post. I saw you as an informed and instinctive moderniser, and had more evidence than most on which to base that belief.

Ten years ago, I visited you in your Westminster office. You had just become opposition spokesman for trade and industry, and I was enormously impressed by your early understanding and adoption of ICT, and most particularly your enthusiasm for the potential of the then infant, world wide web.

So I felt certain that you would greet the important recommendations made in our report,

including those regarding the potential of the parliamentary website, with real enthusiasm.

In our report we agree with you that "we should not view the challenges facing parliament in isolation from the fundamental changes that are shifting the balance in other elements of society" - most of our recommendations are precisely geared to ensuring that parliament becomes better placed to understand and respond to those changes.

You are wrong to conflate parliament's inability to be properly understood with the government's more generalised concerns over what is being lumped together as deteriorating levels of "respect". To believe that "young people swearing on the street" has any direct relationship to a broader lack of respect for our elected officials is, in my opinion, confusing antisocial behaviour with a quite separate breakdown in communication between electors and the elected. You're unlikely to earn the voters respect by threatening them with an Asbo!

You make it clear that your experience is different from mine when I claim there is an "extraordinary confusion" in the public mind between the role of parliament and that of government.

My assertion, unlike yours, is not based on personal experience but on the vast amount of factual evidence that was presented to the commission during its deliberations. Mori, YouGov and the many other sources we relied upon in making our recommendations simply don't agree with you.

You say you warmly welcome a debate about how "we in parliament can bring back some of that sense of respect" - that's fine, but that debate has to be about much more than "respect".

As we say at the outset of our report: "A more effective parliament would make a greater contribution than anything else to a renewal of British democracy . . . the public has a right to expect a parliament which communicates its work promptly, clearly and usefully. . . There is nothing utopian about our recommendations and while there has been some progress, parliament still falls seriously short of achieving these ambitions."

I'm not sure how much you or anyone else in government can do to ignite a new era of respect and trust. What is clear is that respect for parliament will only return when parliament starts to show respect for the public - by acknowledging the public's right to know what is happening in parliament, and by clearly communicating what it is doing, and why.

The young frontbench spokesman I met 10 years ago would have relished this challenge, so it would be more than sad if early capture by the status quo prevented you from enthusiastically pursuing the relatively simple but much-needed changes recommended in our report.

You've generously agreed to see me next week, and I relish the opportunity of going through each of our 39 steps and hearing what, in your judgment, would make any of them undesirable or unachievable.

Lord Puttnam chaired the Hansard Society commission on the communication of

parliamentary democracy. Members Only? *Parliament in the Public Eye* was published on May 24.