



The assisted dying bill

A guide to the legislative process in the House of Lords

10 September 2025

Acknowledgements

This guide was produced by Matthew England and Dr Ruth Fox.

We are grateful for editorial support provided by Richard Greenhill, Kacper Surdy and Sir David Beamish.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Part 1: The constitutional position	6
Five ways the House of Lords can say 'no' to the Bill.....	7
1. Reject the Bill at Second Reading.....	7
2. Reject the Bill at Third Reading	8
3. Delay the progress of the Bill	8
4. Pass "wrecking amendments"	9
5. Reach deadlock on amendments with the House of Commons at 'ping-pong' ...	10
Can the Parliament Act be used to force the Bill through if the Lords rejects it?	10
Why does the Salisbury Convention not apply to this Bill?	12
Could the Bill be carried over to the next Session?	12
Carry-over in the House of Commons.....	13
Carry-over in the House of Lords	13
When will this parliamentary Session end?	13
Is there time left for Private Members' Bills in the House of Commons this Session? ...	13
Part 2: Scheduling the Bill in the Lords	15
Government business and non-government business	15
Will the Bill be debated only on Fridays?	15
When are the sitting Fridays?	16
Will more sitting Fridays be added to the timetable?.....	16
What times will the House of Lords sit to consider the Bill?.....	17
How are debates conducted in the House of Lords?.....	18
Who decides who speaks and when?	18
Are there time limits on speeches?.....	19
Exceptional procedures to stop lengthy speeches	19
Part 3: The legislative process.....	21
What minimum intervals must be observed between stages?	21
How do the minimum intervals between stages apply to this Bill?.....	21
Second Reading	22
How will the debate work?	22
How will the House come to a decision?	23
How long will the Second Reading debate last?.....	23
Select committee scrutiny	25
Which select committees will scrutinise the Bill?	25
Should the Lords take oral and written evidence on the Bill?	26
The proposal: Use the Public Services Committee.....	26

Alternative routes in the legislative process	26
Practical and political considerations	27
Committee Stage	28
Where will Committee Stage take place?	28
Opening Committee Stage: what happens first?	28
How are clauses and schedules considered?	29
How are amendments published and arranged?	29
What kind of amendments are admissible?	30
How are amendments debated and decided?	30
What rules and conventions apply at Committee Stage?	32
How long could Committee Stage last?	32
What happens if progress stalls?.....	32
Report Stage	34
Opening Report Stage: What happens first?	34
How are amendments published and arranged?	34
What kind of amendments are admissible?	34
How are amendments debated and decided?	35
How long could Report Stage last?	35
Third Reading.....	37
What kinds of amendments are admissible at Third Reading?.....	37
Opposing the passage of a Bill	37

Introduction

The assisted dying bill, formally known as the [Terminally Ill Adults \(End of Life\) Bill](#), will have its Second Reading debate in the House of Lords on Friday 12 and Friday 19 September.¹

In March 2024, when he was Leader of the Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer MP promised Dame Esther Rantzen - the broadcaster, campaigner and a terminally ill patient advocating for the right to assisted dying - that a Labour Government would “provide time for a debate and vote” on this issue.²

However, assisted dying was not included in the Labour Party’s general election manifesto nor included in the legislative programme announced in the 2024 King’s Speech. It was instead taken up as a Private Member’s Bill (PMB) sponsored by Labour MP Kim Leadbeater, who secured top spot in the House of Commons PMB ballot, a position that typically offers the best chance for a backbencher to advance legislation.

The Government has adopted a ‘neutral’ stance, and the Bill is subject to a ‘free’ or ‘conscience’ vote by MPs and Peers.

Having received more time for scrutiny than most Government Bills in recent Sessions,³ the Bill was given a Third Reading in the House of Commons by MPs in June 2025 by 314 votes to 291.

As well as being unusually contentious for a Private Member’s Bill, it is also unusually long and complex. When the Bill received its First Reading in the House of Commons on 16 October 2024, it spanned 32 pages of legal text comprising 43 clauses and six schedules, and with financial and other consequences for the NHS and the court system. By the time it was introduced to the Lords by its sponsor in the upper House, Lord Falconer of Thoroton, on 23 June 2025, the Bill had grown to 51 pages, comprising 59 clauses and three schedules.

This briefing seeks to answer common questions about how the Bill is expected to progress through the House of Lords. It explains the key procedures that will apply at Second Reading and, if the Bill secures majority support on 19 September, at the later stages that will follow.

¹ See: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3774/publications>

² B. Riley-Smith, ‘Starmer promises vote on legalising assisted dying’, The Telegraph, 13 March 2024

³ M. England and R. Fox, ‘The Assisted Dying Bill: Rushed And Lacking Scrutiny, Or Unfairly Criticised?’, The House, 5 June 2025

Part 1: The constitutional position

The House of Lords has the authority to reject, delay, or otherwise block the assisted dying bill. Yet the question Peers face is not only whether they can exercise this power, but whether it would be politically prudent to do so. The Bill has secured approval in the House of Commons, albeit by a narrow margin, and Peers must consider whether outright rejection of it in the Lords would uphold or undermine the primacy of the elected chamber – and what the consequences of that decision might be. The House of Lords very rarely rejects a Bill at Second or Third Reading. In fact, it has not done so for 18 years. As an unelected revising chamber, the Lords has traditionally sought to amend and improve legislation rather than veto it. Promoters and opponents of assisted dying have advanced forceful arguments for and against the Bill, but many Members may see their role instead as remedying its defects, much as they do with government legislation.

The Lords retains the formal power to:

- reject a bill at Second or Third Reading; and
- to insist on amendments during ping-pong (consideration of amendments by the two Houses), even if this risks a Bill being lost.

These powers are limited only by the:

- Salisbury Convention – under which the Lords does not block Government Bills promised in the governing party's election manifesto; and
- Parliament Acts – which allow the Commons, in certain circumstances, to override Lords' rejection after a delay of up to one year.

The assisted dying bill is a Private Member's Bill and not a manifesto commitment, so neither the Salisbury Convention nor constitutional self-restraint requires Peers to agree to the legislation (see also page 12).

In theory, if the Lords were to reject the Bill, the Commons could seek to use the Parliament Act to override them. However, these procedures have never been used on a Private Member's Bill and procedural and timing requirements mean the Bill would likely need to be adopted or at least actively supported by the Government for this route to succeed. Thus, a Lords' rejection would break new parliamentary ground if MPs attempted to revive the Bill using the Parliament Act (see also page 10).

In 2006, the Lords rejected the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill at Second Reading. However, that Bill began in the Lords and never reached the Commons, so MPs' views were unknown.

In contrast, the elected Commons has already voted in favour of this latest assisted dying Bill twice, in conscience votes, at:

- Second Reading by 330 to 275 (a majority of 55); and
- Third Reading by 314 to 291 (a majority of 23).

While the majority narrowed, it was still clear approval.

Some have argued that because support at Third Reading fell below half the total membership of the Commons (325 out of 650), the Lords should feel free to reject the Bill. However, this overlooks important context.

- 43 MPs did not vote at Third Reading, of whom:

- 9 were in the Chair and never participate in such votes (the Speaker, 3 Deputy Speakers and 5 Chairs of the Public Bill Committee who take no further role in proceedings on the Bill following their appointment);
- 9 SNP MPs do not normally participate in votes on a Bill that does not apply in Scotland;
- 7 Sinn Féin MPs do not participate because they do not take their seats in the House.
- This leaves only 18 MPs who might reasonably have been expected to vote but, for one reason or another (for example, Ministers being away on government business), did not do so. Even if all had voted against the Bill – which is unlikely – supporters would still have secured a narrow majority of four.

Five ways the House of Lords can say 'no' to the Bill

There are several mechanisms available to Peers to delay, disrupt, or even prevent the Bill from becoming law.

1. Reject the Bill at Second Reading

At this stage, the Lords debates and votes on the general principles of a Bill. There are two ways Peers may reject it. (For more details, see page 22).

- (i) **Voting against the main motion** – "*that the Bill be now read a second time*". This method is rare today, because it is considered better practice ("desirable in the interests of good order") for notice of the opposition of Peers to appear on the Order Paper.⁴
- (ii) **Tabling an amendment to decline Second Reading** – to the effect that "*this House declines to give the Bill a second reading*"
 - a. This is the usual method of rejection, as it ensures proper notice is given and the courtesies of the House are maintained.
 - b. Such amendments may also include reasons for rejecting the Bill (a "reasoned amendment"), setting out the House's objections clearly on the record ("*this House declines to give the Bill a second reading because.....*")

In practice, the Lords usually avoids divisions at Second Reading. Instead, they sometimes divide on non-fatal amendments to the Second Reading motion to register concerns without blocking the Bill.⁵

In this case, Lord Forsyth of Drumlean has tabled a non-fatal amendment, calling for more time and Government support to be given at the amending stages of the Bill, in light of a report by the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee. (For more details, see page 25).

⁴ *Erskine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 25th edition, 2019 (London: Butterworths/LexisNexis), [para 29.16](#)

⁵ Non-fatal amendments normally take the form '*that this House agrees to give the Bill a Second Reading but regrets that...*'. Such amendments, when they succeed, do not block the Bill from further progress.

What precedents are there?

- **Government Bill:** The last rejection at Second Reading occurred in 2007, when the Lords rejected the Fraud (Trials Without a Jury) Bill, which proposed allowing complex fraud cases to be heard without a jury.
- **Private Member's Bill:** The last PMB to be rejected at Second Reading was in 2006, when the Lords rejected the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill.
- **Division at Second Reading:** Excluding non-fatal divisions, the House has only divided at Second Reading twice in the last decade on the:
 - Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill 2024;⁶ and
 - Illegal Migration Bill 2023.⁷

Before 2023, the most recent division was in 2013, on the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill.⁸

2. Reject the Bill at Third Reading

In the House of Lords, Third Reading is usually a formality agreed without debate or division (see also page 37). However, it is followed by a further motion "*that this Bill do now pass*".

- (i) **Direct opposition:** Peers may vote against this motion outright.
- (ii) **Fatal amendments:** Alternatively, as at Second Reading, Peers may move an amendment stating that "this House declines to allow the Bill to pass". If agreed, the Bill is defeated. This amendment may also take the form of a reasoned amendment.

What precedents are there?

- The last rejection of any Bill at Third Reading took place in 1984, when the Lords refused to pass the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill. This was a Private Member's Bill, introduced to the Lords, which aimed to make discrimination against disabled people unlawful.⁹
- An identical PMB had been introduced in the Commons earlier in the Session, but the Government opposed it. The Whips ensured no decision was taken in the Commons, by whipping its MPs against the closure motion. The Lords rejection was therefore consistent with the Government's stance in the Commons.¹⁰

3. Delay the progress of the Bill

Time in the Lords is finite, and there is a limit to how much the Government or a Bill's sponsors are willing to allocate to a single measure. If in the face of a tidal wave of amendments a Bill looks set to consume an excessive amount of time, it may be put on

⁶ House of Lords, Hansard, [29 January 2024](#), vol. 835, col. 1101

⁷ House of Lords, Hansard, [10 May 2023](#), vol. 829, col. 1928

⁸ House of Lords, Hansard, [4 June 2013](#), vol. 745, col. 1110

⁹ Unlike in the House of Commons, Peers do not typically divide on Third Reading. Instead, after Third Reading is agreed to, a motion "*that this Bill do now pass*" is put to the House. It was on this motion that the Bill was defeated. See: House of Lords, Hansard, [3 April 1984](#), vol. 450, col. 671.

¹⁰ House of Lords, Hansard, [18 November 1983](#), vol. 48, col. 1146.

hold or abandoned altogether. Delaying a Bill's progress is often the most effective way of stopping a Bill in the Lords.

This occurs most commonly at Committee Stage where, unlike the Commons, there is no fixed end date (see also page 32). Even a small number of Peers can drag out proceedings, making it impossible for a Bill to finish its proceedings before the parliamentary Session ends.

The Government can usually find more time for its own Bills, but Private Members' Bills are particularly vulnerable to delay.

Case study: Committee Stage tactics on the Assisted Dying Bill 2014

- Before the first sitting, Peers tabled 183 amendments to a 13-clause Bill.
- Only 12 amendments were considered on the first day.
- Between the first and second sittings, 66 new amendments were tabled.
- On the second day, only four more amendments were considered.
- After two sittings, there were 50 more amendments outstanding than there had been at the start of day one. It was clear that further progress was impossible in the time available and no more sittings were scheduled.

Sitting date	Number of amendments before the sitting	Number of amendments after the sitting
7 November 2014 (day one)	183	171
16 January 2015 (day two)	237	233

Case study: Committee Stage tactics on the Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill 2023

- This Private Members' Bill, just three pages long, had already passed the Commons and received an unopposed Second Reading in the Lords.
- Before the first sitting, a small group of Peers tabled 64 amendments. The usual practice is to group related amendments for debate, but the Peers proposing the amendments insisted that each one be debated separately.
- By the end of the first sitting, only five amendments had been dealt with.
- It was clear that the Bill faced no prospect of success before the end of the Session, so no further sittings were scheduled.

4. Pass "wrecking amendments"

Peers opposed to a Bill may table amendments designed to undermine it – amendments that are unworkable, contradictory, or nonsensical, or which significantly alter its purpose. If such amendments are agreed, the Government or a Bill's sponsor(s) may choose to abandon the bill altogether or rely on the Commons to remove the damaging amendments.

5. Reach deadlock on amendments with the House of Commons at 'ping-pong'

The Bill can only become law once both Houses agree the exact same text and it can be sent for Royal Assent. After Third Reading in the Lords, any amendments made there are sent back to the Commons for consideration. This back-and-forth exchange is known as legislative "ping-pong".

- **Commons options:** For each Lords amendment, MPs may agree to it, reject it outright, or propose an alternative.
- **Lords' options:** If the Commons disagrees with an amendment, Peers must decide whether to:
 - insist on their original amendment;
 - accept the Commons position; or
 - offer a compromise version.

This cycle can repeat itself multiple times. However, if both Houses insist on their positions without compromise, the situation is known as "double insistence". This convention holds that if the Lords say something must be done, and the Commons refuse to do it and offer no compromise, and then the Lords insist on their original change and the Commons insist on their original rejection, the whole bill is lost. The last time this is thought to have occurred was on the 1997-98 European Parliamentary Elections Bill.

Normally, there is a strong incentive in both Houses to avoid this scenario and so every effort at compromise is usually made. As Erskine May explains, "there is no binding rule of order which governs these proceedings in either House, and, if there is a desire to save a bill, some variation in the proceedings may be devised in order to effect this object."¹¹ There have thus been instances where bills have been revived following 'double insistence' where the two Houses have eventually reached a compromise agreement. For example, double insistence inadvertently occurred on the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, but a Lords motion "to vary the normal practice of the House" kept the Bill alive.

Can the Parliament Act be used to force the Bill through if the Lords rejects it?

The Parliament Act 1911 (later amended by the Parliament Act 1949) removed the veto of the House of Lords over legislation. Subject to certain conditions, the House of Commons can invoke the Parliament Act procedures to present legislation for Royal Assent without the approval of the House of Lords.¹²

The procedures apply only to Public and not Private Bills (legislation which only applies to specific individuals or organisations rather than the general public). The assisted dying bill is a Public Bill because its provisions change the general law (confusingly, it is a Private Member's Bill, but the term Private refers to the fact the legislation is sponsored by a non-government MP, not to the type of law).

¹¹ *Erskine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 25th edition, 2019 (London: Butterworths/LexisNexis), [para 30.25](#)

¹² See The Parliament Act 1911: A procedural guide (Hansard Society: 2024), <https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/publications/guides/the-parliament-act-1911-a-procedural-guide>

The Parliament Act procedure does not apply to a Public Bill which was first introduced in the House of Lords rather than the Commons or which attempts to prolong the duration of a Parliament beyond five years. Neither of these constraints is relevant to the assisted dying bill.

The Parliament Act procedure

Under Section 2 of the Parliament Act 1911 (as amended in 1949), a Bill that has been passed by the Commons can still receive Royal Assent without the approval of the Lords, provided four conditions are met:

1. Rejection or failure in two successive sessions

The Lords must have failed to pass the Bill in two successive parliamentary Sessions. This could be because:

- a. it rejected the Bill outright, at Second or Third Reading;
- b. the Bill did not complete its passage in the Lords; or
- c. the Lords insisted on amendments that the House of Commons refused to accept.

2. At least one year between Commons stages

At least one calendar year must have elapsed between:

- a. the date of the Bill's Second Reading in the Commons in the first Session; and
- b. the date of its Third Reading in the House of Commons in the second Session.

3. Timing within Sessions

In both Sessions, the Commons must send the Bill to the Lords at least one month before the Session ends.

4. Identical bills in both Sessions

The Bills passed by the House of Commons in both Sessions must be "identical", with only limited exceptions for certain amendments namely:

- a. the amendments are certified by the Speaker of the House of Commons as necessary owing to the time which has elapsed since the date of the former Bill;
- b. the amendments are certified by the Speaker of the House of Commons as representing any amendments which were made by the House of Lords in the first Session;
- c. the amendments are certified by the Speaker of the House of Commons as amendments which have been made by the House of Lords in the second Session and agreed to by the House of Commons; or
- d. the House of Commons has suggested amendments in the second Session and these amendments have then been agreed to by the House of Lords.

In summary, if the Commons and Lords cannot agree on the same version of the assisted dying bill by the end of this Session, it may be reintroduced in the Commons in the next Session. If the Commons were to pass this bill in identical form to the version it agreed at Third Reading in the current Session, and the Lords again failed to pass it in that Session, then the Government could invoke the Parliament Act to send it directly for Royal Assent.

Importantly, the second-Session Bill must be identical to the Commons version agreed at Third Reading in this Session, except where limited, Speaker-certified amendments are permitted.

However, in practice the Parliament Act procedure has only ever been applied to Government Bills. It has been used sparingly in over a century of law-making: only seven Acts of Parliament have been passed using the procedures to override the objections of the Lords since the Act was introduced in 1911¹³. There have also been three occasions when an identical Bill has been introduced to the House of Commons in a second, successive Session, only for the Lords to back down and agree to the Bill.¹⁴

It would take an unusual combination of circumstances, challenging to orchestrate, for a Private Member's Bill to be passed using these procedures. A backbench MP high enough up in the Private Members' Bill ballot would need to adopt the Bill and be able to navigate it through the Commons PMB procedures without amendment in the limited time available, in accordance with the conditions set out above. It would surely require some degree of Government co-ordination and perhaps whipping.

It might even require the Government to adopt the assisted dying bill in a second Session to invoke these procedures.

Why does the Salisbury Convention not apply to this Bill?

The Salisbury Convention is a constitutional convention governing the treatment of legislation by the House of Lords. It is widely accepted by Peers on all sides of the House.

The Convention provides that the Lords should not reject Government legislation that was explicitly promised in the governing party's election manifesto. In practice, it imposes three requirements on the Lord's handling of such Bills:

1. **Second Reading** – the House should allow the Bill a Second Reading;
2. **No wrecking amendments** – the House should avoid amendments designed to make the Bill unworkable; and
3. **Timely passage** - the House should pass the Bill and send it (back) to the Commons in reasonable time.¹⁵

Since the assisted dying bill is neither a Government Bill nor a manifesto commitment, the Salisbury Convention does not apply in this case.

Could the Bill be carried over to the next Session?

Normally, when a parliamentary Session ends, any Bills that have not completed their passage fall. One way to avoid this is through a carry-over motion, which allows a Bill to continue into the next Session.

¹³ The seven Acts passed using the Parliament Act 1911 are: the Government of Ireland Act 1914; the Welsh Church Act 1914; the Parliament Act 1949; the War Crimes Act 1991; the European Parliament Elections Act 1999; the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000; and the Hunting Act 2004.

¹⁴ Hansard Society (2024), [The Parliament Act 1911: A procedural guide](#)

¹⁵ Sharpe, J. (2020), [Parliamentary Conventions](#) (The Constitution Society), p. 7

Carry-over in the House of Commons

Carry-over motions in the Commons are governed by Standing Order No. 80A.

Bills are eligible for carry-over if they:

- started in the Commons; and
- have not yet had their Third Reading in the Commons.

This means Bills already passed by the Commons cannot be carried over, and those that originated in the Lords are also ineligible, unless a motion to set aside the Standing Orders in relation to carry-over is agreed.

Carry-over in the House of Lords

The Lords has no Standing Orders that govern the operation of carry-over motions, so the process is handled more informally. According to Erskine May, carry-over is restricted to Bills that began in the Lords and have not yet been passed by it.¹⁶

There is one exception to this: in 2004, the Lords agreed to a recommendation from the House of Lords Procedure Committee that Government Bills brought from the Commons could be carried over if they had been subject to pre-legislative scrutiny. In practice, however, the Lords has only ever used a carry-over motion for Bills that began in the House of Lords.¹⁷

Since the assisted dying bill is not a Government Bill, did not begin in the House of Lords, and has not been subject to pre-legislative scrutiny, precedent would suggest it would not be eligible for carry-over and must therefore complete its passage by the end of this Session.

When will this parliamentary Session end?

The exact end date of the current parliamentary Session has not yet been confirmed. The then Leader of the House of Commons, Lucy Powell MP, said at the beginning of the new parliamentary term on 2 September that this will be an unusually long Session stretching well into Spring 2026.¹⁸

It is widely anticipated that the Session could continue into April or May. In past Sessions that extended beyond a calendar year, prorogation (the formal end of the Session) has often been timed just before or just after the local elections in early May.

This timing allows the Government to draw a line under debate about its performance at the polls, and quickly pivot attention to a new Session, marked by the State Opening of Parliament and King's Speech, which sets out the Government's fresh legislative agenda.

Is there time left for Private Members' Bills in the House of Commons this Session?

In the House of Commons, 13 Fridays per parliamentary session are allocated for PMB debates in the Commons Chamber – a carve-out from the usual rule that "Government

¹⁶ *Erskine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 25th edition, 2019 (London: Butterworths/LexisNexis), [para. 30.35](#)

¹⁷ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2025, para. 8.9, n8

¹⁸ See <https://x.com/CommonsLeader/status/1962906242021527815>

business shall have precedence at every sitting”.¹⁹ This Session, all 13 days were used up before the Summer recess.

There is, however, precedent for creating extra PMB sitting days when a Session runs unusually long. That will almost certainly happen again, because most PMBs this Session have been held up behind the assisted dying bill, meaning none have reached the statute book within the normal timeframe.

It is therefore highly likely that additional time will be allocated before the end of the Session, especially to deal with the later stages of PMBs and to consider any Lords amendments.

Indeed, if the assisted dying bill receives a Third Reading in both Houses, it is almost unthinkable that time would not be made available to ensure its passage is completed.

¹⁹ House of Commons, Standing Orders - Public Business, 23 May 2024, HC 829, Standing Order No. 14(1)

Part 2: Scheduling the Bill in the Lords

The arrangement of business in the House of Lords is less formal and predictable than in the House of Commons.

Government business and non-government business

In the Commons, Standing Orders give government business precedence at every sitting, except when certain designated time is allocated for Opposition Days, Backbench Business debates, and on some Fridays to Private Members' Bills. This creates a sharp divide between "government time" and "non-government time".

The Lords, however, operate differently. Their Standing Orders make no such distinction between government and non-government time, nor between Government Bills and Private Members' Bills.²⁰ Nor is there a rule that requires either type of business to be taken on a specific day or at a particular time.

In practice, however, Peers recognise the need for the elected Government's legislative programme to proceed. Government business is therefore normally given priority on Mondays through Wednesdays, and occasionally also on Thursdays. On occasion, non-contentious Private Members' Bills may also be slotted into these days. Private Members' Bills which are expected to give rise to debate are typically, though not always, taken on Fridays, mirroring the practice in the House of Commons.

Will the Bill be debated only on Fridays?

Two Fridays – 12 and 19 September – have already been set aside for the Bill's Second Reading.

What is less certain is whether the later stages will also be confined to Fridays, or whether time might be made available on a weekday earlier in the week.

Who decides? There is no Standing Order requiring Friday sittings. The scheduling of later stages will be determined through the Usual Channels (the party business managers). Any move to allocate non-Friday time would need Government co-operation.

Why Fridays are likely: The Government's legislative programme in the Lords is already heavily congested. Since Committee Stage of this Bill will take place in the Chamber, granting it time on Monday to Thursday could disrupt Government business. Precedent also favours Fridays: previous assisted dying bills, including the 2014 Bill, were debated on Fridays.²¹

Why Fridays pose problems: Attendance in the Lords is generally lower on Fridays and many Peers count on finishing by 3pm. Practical considerations contribute to this: Peers are unpaid so some will have outside work commitments, and older members will find a fifth long sitting day each week physically demanding at a time when the House is regularly

²⁰ *Erskine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 25th edition, 2019 (London: Butterworths/LexisNexis), paras. [25.7](#) and [29.6](#)

²¹ See: House of Lords, Hansard, [18 July 2014](#), vol. 755; House of Lords, Hansard, [7 November 2014](#), vol. 756; House of Lords, Hansard, [16 January 2015](#), vol. 758.

sitting later than the Commons. For those who live outside London, last-minute Friday travel can also be costly and will have to be drawn out of their daily attendance allowance.

When are the sitting Fridays?

The House of Lords usually meets on Fridays once or twice a month. The dates are set by the Government Chief Whip in consultation with the Usual Channels and are announced in advance.²² For the rest of 2025, eight sitting Fridays have been scheduled. None have yet been announced for 2026.²³

- 12 September
- 19 September
- 24 October
- 31 October
- 14 November
- 21 November
- 5 December
- 12 December

The Bill's Second Reading will occupy the two September dates, leaving just six Fridays this year for any further stages, unless the Whips decide to add some more sitting Fridays.

Will more sitting Fridays be added to the timetable?

In the Lords, Bills are not "programmed": there is no fixed timetable for their stages. The only hard deadline is the end of the parliamentary Session. The current Session has been confirmed as unusually long and is expected to run until Spring 2026 (likely April or May). This means additional sitting Fridays can be scheduled in 2026.

How many more Fridays? If the usual rhythm of one or two Fridays per month is maintained, that would provide perhaps eight to nine further Fridays in 2026. Even with these extra days, however, it is not certain that 15 Fridays in total after Second Reading would be enough for this Bill to clear all its stages.

Why might so much time be needed?

- In Committee, every clause and amendment must be dealt with – nothing can be skipped or selected. Determined opponents can prolong proceedings by tabling large numbers of amendments, speaking at length, and insisting on smaller groups of amendments for debate.
- Report Stage in the Lords typically takes up half as much time as Committee, with a further day for Third Reading. For example, if Committee stretches to seven or eight days, Report Stage could take three or four, plus a day for Third Reading.
- Customary minimum intervals between stages – e.g., at least 14 calendar days between the end of Committee Stage and the start of Report Stage – may also slow progress.

²² Office of the Leader of the House of Commons and the Cabinet Office, [Guide to Parliamentary Work](#), para. 10.

²³ House of Lords Government Whips' Office, [Sitting Fridays](#)

Other pressures on Fridays: The assisted dying bill will be competing for limited Friday slots with:

- **Commons PMBs:** Eight other Private Members' Bills have already cleared the Commons and await Lords scrutiny. The Government supports these and could, in theory, find weekday time for them – but that would cut into its own legislative programme.
- **Lords PMBs:** 28 further Private Members' Bills introduced in the Lords are still awaiting consideration. None are supported by the Government, and all of them have little chance of becoming law. But these Bills would typically receive a debate on Fridays, and their sponsors may be aggrieved if Friday sittings are monopolised by the assisted dying bill.
- **General debates:** Fridays are sometimes used for discussion of wider issues of public importance. In this session, for example, there have been general debates on Fridays on the Strategic Defence Review, the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, social cohesion, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, Ukraine, and Sudan. In recent years, a tradition has also grown up of allocating a Friday late in the calendar year for a general debate introduced by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In 2024 this was held on Friday 6 December, but was introduced by the Archbishop of York as the Archbishop of Canterbury was about to resign. It is not yet clear whether the Usual Channels will offer a Friday sitting for this purpose this year, given that a new Archbishop of Canterbury has not yet been appointed.
- **Select committee reports:** Reports published by Lords committees also occasionally take Friday debating slots.

More Fridays will almost certainly be added in 2026 but the combination of lengthy Lords procedures, procedural tactics, and competing claims on Friday business means that even an expanded schedule may struggle to accommodate the Bill.

What times will the House of Lords sit to consider the Bill?

Unlike the Commons, the House of Lords has no fixed cut off ("moment of interruption") for its business. Instead, each sitting day has a target finishing time which the House aims, but is not bound, to meet. The normal sitting times are as follows:

- Friday sittings (most likely for this Bill): 10:00am - 3:00pm.
- Weekday sittings (if extra time is granted):
 - Monday: 2:30pm – 10:00pm
 - Tuesday: 2:30pm – 10:00pm
 - Wednesday: 3:00pm – 10:00pm
 - Thursday: 11:00am – 7:00pm

These times are only guidelines. If business overruns or debate moves slowly, the House often simply continues beyond them. In this Session, the Lords has already sat past midnight on seven occasions. So, while the Bill's debates are likely to be scheduled within these target hours, Peers and the watching public should be prepared for proceedings to spill well beyond them.

How are debates conducted in the House of Lords?

Debates in the House of Lords begin when a member moves a motion (for example, that the Bill “be now read a second time” or “that the amendment be made”). The Chair then formally proposes that motion as a question to the House, after which other members may speak in turn.

Key points:

- **Right of reply:** The mover of a motion (at Second Reading, typically the Bill’s sponsor) opens the debate and has the right to reply with a second speech at the end of the debate.
- **One-speech rule:** Other members may speak once only on that motion (at Second Reading, Report or Third Reading). However, Ministers, the sponsor, or another member seeking to explain a material point in their speech may speak more than once with the leave of the House.
- **The Committee exception:** At Committee Stage, the one-speech rule does not apply. A member may speak more than once to a question – for example, a motion that an amendment be agreed to – so allowing a more conversational, probing style of scrutiny.

Who decides who speaks and when?

Unlike in the Commons, the Chair in the House of Lords (the Lord Speaker) does not control who speaks or when in debates. Instead, the order of speaking is usually organised through the “Usual Channels”, namely discussions between Government and Opposition Whips.

- **Speakers’ lists:** For many debates, the Government Whips’ Office issues a daily [Today’s List](#) setting out the proposed order of speakers.
- **When speakers’ lists apply:** For legislation, speakers’ lists are used only at Second Reading.
- **When speakers’ lists do not apply:** At later stages – Committee, Report and Third Reading – contributions are managed more informally. Members typically take turns by party, but this has to be more flexible for a Private Members’ Bill that cuts across party lines. If two Peers rise to speak simultaneously, then other members of the House will indicate audibly whom they wish to hear first.
- **Friday debates:** If a debate is scheduled for a Friday, Peers must sign up to speak by a certain time, normally before 4pm on the preceding day. For this Bill’s Second Reading, the sign-up deadline is 5pm on the preceding Wednesday.
- **Sign-up period:** During the sign-up period before the debate, the Government Whips’ Office updates and publishes daily an alphabetical list of all the Peers who wish to speak (see, for example, the [Government Whips’ Office - Open Speakers’ List](#) for the Second Reading debate).
- **Speaking “in the gap”:** If a Peer misses the deadline for the speakers’ list, normally they may still contribute briefly at the end of the debate “in the gap”, just before the final winding up speeches (normally given either by the sponsor of a Private Members’ Bill, or by a Minister in the case of a Government Bill and their opposite number). For the assisted dying bill, however, given that Peers have known for weeks when the Second Reading debate would take place and have had plenty of

time to sign-up to the speakers' list, any Peer trying to speak "in the gap" would likely be shouted down by their fellow Members.

Are there time limits on speeches?

Debates on legislation in the House of Lords are not subject to fixed time limits – neither for the debate itself nor for individual speeches. This means that, in theory, debates can run as long as members wish.

- **Advisory time limits:** To help manage business, the Government Whips' Office often publishes advisory time limits in the daily Today's List. These are not binding but set expectations for contributions. At Committee, Report and Third Reading, there are advisory time limits of 15 minutes for members opening or winding up a debate, and other members are expected to keep within 10 minutes.²⁴
- **Informal discipline:** If speeches or debates drag on, Peers typically rely on collective signals of disapproval – "peer pressure" – rather than formal rules to bring matters to a close.

Exceptional procedures to stop lengthy speeches

Two procedural tools exist to stop excessively long speeches or debates.

1. **Closure motions ("That the question be now put")**
 - A Peer may propose this motion to enable the House to decide whether to end the debate and move straight to a vote. If Peers reject the motion, then the debate continues.
 - Though widely used in the Commons on sifting Fridays for Private Members' Bills, in the Lords this procedure is treated as highly exceptional. Whenever attempted, the Chair reminds the House of its extraordinary nature and offers the mover a chance to withdraw it.
 - The closure was not used at all between 1971 and 2011.
 - Since 2011, it has been moved 16 times in relation to five Bills:
 - twice during Committee Stage for the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill 2011²⁵;
 - once during Committee Stage for the European Union (Referendum) Bill 2014²⁶;
 - once during Report Stage for the House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) (Abolition of By-Elections) Bill 2019²⁷;
 - six times during a debate to set aside Standing Orders to enable all scrutiny stages to be taken in a single day for the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 5) Bill 2019²⁸; and

²⁴ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2025, para. 4.41

²⁵ House of Lords, Hansard, [17 January 2011](#), vol. 724, col. 138; and House of Lords, Hansard, [19 January 2011](#), vol. 724, col. 392

²⁶ House of Lords, Hansard, [31 January 2014](#), vol. 751, col. 1545

²⁷ House of Lords, Hansard, [15 March 2019](#), vol. 796, col. 1235

²⁸ House of Lords, Hansard, [4 April 2019](#), vol. 797, cols. 241, 250, 271, 286, 296, and 312

- six times during a debate to set aside Standing Orders to enable all scrutiny stages to be taken in a single day for the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 6) Bill 2019.²⁹

2. “That the noble Lord be no longer heard” motions

- A Peer may propose this motion if a speech is “seriously transgressing the accepted practice of the House”.³⁰
- This motion is used even more rarely than a closure motion: there have been only two attempts to do so since 2000 – during the passage of the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill 2000³¹, and the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill 2011³² – of which only the latter was successful.
- One of the reasons this procedure is so rarely used is that the motion is debatable and so eats into the time available for the main debate.

²⁹ House of Lords, Hansard, [4 September 2019](#), vol. 799, cols. 1024, 1035, 1068, 1084, 1094, and 1119

³⁰ *Erskine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 25th edition, 2019 (London: Butterworths/LexisNexis), [para. 25.78](#)

³¹ House of Lords, Hansard, [1 November 2000](#), vol. 618, col. 1001

³² House of Lords, Hansard, [14 July 2011](#), vol. 729, col. 958

Part 3: The legislative process

A Bill follows the same legislative stages in the House of Lords as it does in the House of Commons: First Reading, Second Reading, Committee, Report, and Third Reading

What minimum intervals must be observed between stages?

In the Lords, unlike the Commons, there is a convention that minimum intervals are observed between each stage of a Bill. The standard timetable is:³³

Stages	Minimum interval
Between First Reading and Second Reading	Two weekends
Between Second Reading and the start of Committee Stage	14 calendar days
Between the end of Committee Stage and the start of Report Stage (for "all bills of considerable length and complexity")	14 calendar days
Between the end of Report Stage and Third Reading	Three sitting days (excluding the day on which the previous stage is concluded)

These are described in the Government's *Guide to Making Legislation* as the "conventional minimum timetable for a Bill of reasonable length and complexity".³⁴ Shortening them is possible only by agreement through the Usual Channels (the party Whips).³⁵

How do the minimum intervals between stages apply to this Bill?

- Two weekends between First and Second Reading: this has already been greatly exceeded, since First Reading took place before Summer recess on 23 June and Second Reading is scheduled for 12 and 19 September.
- 14 calendar days between Second Reading and Committee: the House will rise for the Conference recess on 19 September and return on 13 October, meaning the gap will be closer to a month.
- 14 calendar days between Committee and Report Stage: the "14-day" rule counts the day Committee ends, so it is possible to line up two stages exactly two Fridays apart. This will matter if proceedings remain confined to Fridays.

³³ *Erskine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 25th edition, 2019 (London: Butterworths/LexisNexis), [para. 29.3](#)

³⁴ Cabinet Office, *Guide to Making Legislation*, para. 32.6

³⁵ Cabinet Office, *Guide to Making Legislation*, para. 32.6

Second Reading

The Bill's Second Reading debate will take place over two Fridays – 12 and 19 September. At this stage, the Lords debates the general principles of the Bill, not its detailed provisions. No amendments to the text of the Bill can be made at this stage.

How will the debate work?

- The sponsor of the Bill, Lord Falconer of Thoroton, will open the debate by moving the main motion: *"that the Bill be now read a second time"*. He will then make a speech outlining the Bill's key principles and provisions and why he believes the House should support it.
- When his speech ends, the Chair (the Lord Speaker or one of the Deputy Speakers) will stand and formally propose the question *"that the Bill be now read a second time"*.
- Early on during the debate, Peers may also move amendments to the motion – these must be tabled in advance to give the House notice of what is intended. An amendment to the motion may take one of two forms:
 - a fatal amendment: this would change the motion to *"That this House declines to give the Bill a second reading"* (sometimes the reasons for doing so will be set out at the end of the motion (*"That this House declines to give the Bill a second reading because"*) in which case this is known as a reasoned amendment).
 - a non-fatal amendment: this would record a concern or regret about the Bill while still allowing it to progress (for example, *"this House agrees to give the Bill a Second Reading, but regrets that..."*).
- Lord Forsyth of Drumlean has given notice that he intends to move a non-fatal amendment calling for more time to be allocated at Committee and Report Stage, following the report by the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee which recommends several amendments be made to the Bill.³⁶
- If an amendment is moved, the House will formally debate a new motion: *"That the amendment be made"*.
- After the Second Reading motion is moved, the debate will occur with speakers contributing in the order specified in the speakers' list. The Whips will calculate an advisory time limit on speeches, based roughly on the number of speakers and the expected length of the debate.
- At the end of the first day of debate, a Whip will seek to move that the debate be adjourned. It is expected that the Government Whips' Office will indicate in advance who will be the last speaker that day as well as a recommended time limit for backbench speakers. By the time the debate starts, Members and the watching public will have a fair idea of the finishing time. But debate is certain to continue beyond the normal 3pm end of a sitting on a Friday. A 5pm or 6pm finish is more likely.

³⁶ The full text of the motion, as amended, would read: *"That the Bill be now read a second time, but that this House calls upon His Majesty's Government, in the light of the 32nd Report from the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, to ensure sufficient time is available for consideration of amending stages of this bill, and to provide full support at ministerial and official level to the peer in charge of the bill for its remaining stages in the House of Lords."*

- The second day of debate will not begin with a speech by the sponsor of the Bill or mover of the amendment, but rather the House will continue moving down the speakers' list.

How will the House come to a decision?

- At the end of the debate, if a Peer has moved an amendment, either fatal or non-fatal, (s)he must decide whether to withdraw it or press it to a vote ("to test the opinion of the House"). Withdrawal requires the unanimous consent of the House. To determine that consent, the Chair will ask, *"Is it your Lordships' pleasure that the amendment be withdrawn?"* If even one peer objects, the amendment cannot be withdrawn and must be decided on. If no one objects, the Chair declares, *"Amendment by leave withdrawn"*.
- If a fatal amendment is pressed to a vote:
 - If the House votes in favour of it, the Bill will fall. Normally, when the House agrees to an amendment to a motion it would then vote on the motion as amended, without further debate. In this case, however, if the House agrees a fatal amendment, this is seen as equivalent to the rejection of the Second Reading motion, so no further vote is taken.
 - If the House votes against it, Peers will still be required to vote on the main Second Reading motion.
- If both a fatal and non-fatal amendment have been tabled, it is likely that the fatal amendment will be moved at the start of the debate. Only one amendment is moved at the start of the debate. If the fatal amendment succeeds, the non-fatal amendment will not be put to the House. If it fails or is withdrawn, then the peer who tabled the non-fatal amendment must decide whether to move it. If they decide to move it, it will be put to the House without debate.
- If no amendment is put to a vote, or if an amendment(s) is rejected, the House will vote on the Second Reading motion (*"that the Bill be now read a second time"*):
 - If the House votes in favour of it, the Bill will proceed to the next stage, namely Committee stage. If a fatal amendment was rejected, the Second Reading should proceed without a division.
 - If the House votes against it, the Bill will fall, and it will make no further progress. This would be very unusual, since, as the House of Lords Companion to the Standing Orders makes clear, Peers are not able to give notice of their intention simply to oppose the motion on the Order Paper, and notice is seen as *"desirable in the interests of good order"*.³⁷ (See also page 27)

How long will the Second Reading debate last?

Most Second Readings in the Lords are completed in a single sitting, usually ending at the day's normal finishing time. For this Bill, however, the scale of interest has forced an extra sitting day.

³⁷ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2025, para. 8.46

- In 2014, the Second Reading of the Assisted Dying Bill (also sponsored by Lord Falconer) ran for nearly 10 hours in one day (finishing at 7:44pm), with 128 peers speaking. On that occasion, there were no divisions (formal recorded votes), which would have added time to the length of the sitting day.
- This time, more than 200 peers have already signed up to speak. Even with a four-minute advisory limit, debate would run for over 13 hours.
- To accommodate this, the Government has scheduled two full Fridays of debate.

Although unusual, two-day Second Readings have taken place before, most notably during the Brexit years when interest was exceptionally high:

- European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill 2017: Debated over two days, 20 and 21 February, totalling 19 hours, with 190 peers signed up to speak.
- European Union (Withdrawal) Bill 2018: Debated over two days, 30 and 31 January, totalling 21 hours, again with 190 peers on the speakers' list.

Select committee scrutiny

Which select committees will scrutinise the Bill?

Two specialist select committees in the House of Lords scrutinise all Bills – whether Government bills or Private Members' Bills. Each committee focuses on a different aspect of scrutiny.

- **Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee (DPRRC):** Its role is to ensure that the powers Parliament proposes to delegate to ministers or other bodies are appropriate. Specifically, it will assess whether the powers are too broad or inadequately constrained, and whether the proposed parliamentary oversight of these powers is strong enough. The DPRRC normally reports on a bill between Second Reading and Committee Stage.

Unusually, the Committee has already produced [its report on the assisted dying bill](#) before Second Reading.³⁸ Its criticisms of the delegated powers and recommendations for amendments broadly mirror those made by the Hansard Society in our briefing published a couple of weeks earlier.³⁹

The DPRRC report draws the attention of the House to 14 out of 42 delegated powers in the Bill and notes three key themes to its findings and recommendations:

- “some delegated powers have very limited provision on the face of the Bill and leave so much to delegated legislation that there is insufficient detail or principle evident for proper Parliamentary scrutiny of the underlying policy;
- in some cases, particularly where a substantial regulatory regime may be needed, this tendency results in skeleton legislation;
- there are several clauses where delegated powers can be used to do anything that an Act of Parliament can do. This is a highly inappropriate formulation that gives sweeping, unspecified and unjustified powers to the Government while removing Parliament's scrutiny role for provision that should be in primary legislation and replacing it with the considerably more limited role of scrutinising delegated legislation.”

A non-fatal amendment to the Second Reading motion, tabled by Lord Forsyth of Drumlean, calls for more time to be allocated to the amending stages of the Bill in light of this DPRRC report. If agreed, this amendment would not kill the Bill and is not binding on the House, but it would give a strong steer to the business managers that Peers want more time to be provided for consideration of the Bill, particularly its delegated powers.

- **Constitution Committee:** Its role is to consider whether a Bill raises constitutional issues and, if so, to draw them to the attention of the House. This Committee also normally reports on a Bill between Second Reading and Committee Stage. A report on the assisted dying bill is not yet published.

³⁸ House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee (2024-26), 32nd Report, [Terminally Ill Adults \(End of Life\) Bill](#), HL 171

³⁹ England, M. (29 August 2025), [Delegated powers in the assisted dying bill: Issues for the attention of the House of Lords](#) (Hansard Society)

Should the Lords take oral and written evidence on the Bill?

In a recent [open letter to all Peers](#), several backbench members called for the House of Lords to create a forum for taking oral and written evidence on the Bill.⁴⁰ They argued that when the Commons Public Bill Committee took oral evidence earlier this year, the Bill emerged in significantly revised form by the time it was sent to the Lords.

At present, the Lords almost never takes oral and written evidence at Committee stage. The differences between Lords version of the Bill and the Bill as introduced to the Commons is a universal issue, since Government Bills are also often substantially amended during their passage through the Commons.⁴¹ However, some Peers argue that this Bill in particular warrants special treatment.

The proposal: Use the Public Services Committee

The letter calls for the House of Lords Public Services Committee – an existing select committee that scrutinises public services, including the NHS – to hold a limited number of oral evidence sessions with Ministers and professional bodies before Committee Stage begins.

Practicality: Committee Stage is unlikely to begin before Friday 24 October. With the House in recess until 13 October, the Public Services Committee could schedule oral evidence sessions in the two intervening weeks between 13 October and 24 October.

Authority: The Committee would not require Government approval or a formal resolution of the House to proceed.

What remains unclear is whether the letter's signatories are calling for:

- a conventional committee inquiry led by the Public Services Committee; or
- a procedure embedding oral and written evidence directly into the legislative process for this Bill.

Alternative routes in the legislative process

After Second Reading, Lord Falconer will move a motion that the Bill be committed to a Committee of the Whole House for its Committee Stage. This motion is amendable, so Peers could propose alternative options:

- **Commitment to a select committee:** The House could establish a select committee specifically to scrutinise the Bill. It could be empowered to take oral and written evidence, then report back to the House with recommendations. A select committee must either recommend either that the Bill proceed (with or without amendments) or that it should not proceed. If the latter, the Bill would be halted unless the House passed a motion enabling the Bill to continue. Even if considered by a select committee, Bills must still undergo scrutiny by a Committee of the Whole House afterwards.

⁴⁰ @lucianaberger on X.com (8 September 2025):
<https://x.com/lucianaberger/status/1965008178774778>

⁴¹ To take one example, the Employment Rights Bill doubled in size from 149 pages to 299 pages during its passage through the House of Commons alone. Oral and written evidence was only taken in the House of Commons, however.

- **Commitment to a special public bill committee:** These function similarly to public bill committees in the House of Commons. They consider a Bill clause by clause and decide on any amendments. However, they also have the power to take oral and written evidence. Unlike a select committee, a special public bill committee does not produce a report on a Bill or make recommendations, and once finished, the Bill moves straight to Report Stage, skipping Committee of the Whole House.

Practical and political considerations

Both these alternative options are rarely used. Special public bill committees are normally reserved for uncontroversial Law Commission bills.

Fastest route: Procedurally, the simplest way to take oral and written evidence would be for an existing select committee – such as the Public Services Committee – to initiate its own inquiry and evidence sessions. Committing the Bill to a select committee would delay its passage by weeks, while a special public bill committee would remove the opportunity for the wider House to participate at Committee Stage.

Membership concerns: However, existing select committees may not reflect the balance of opinion in the Lords. If, for example, the Public Services Committee were disproportionately supportive of the Bill, its inquiry might do little to build wider confidence and trust in the process. In contrast, the membership of a new select committee or special public bill committee would be set by the Committee of Selection and could be tailored to mirror the divisions expressed at Second Reading.

Committee Stage

Committee Stage in the House of Lords has the same central purpose as in the Commons: the Bill is examined clause by clause, with Peers deciding whether each clause should “stand part” of the Bill (that is, be included in the Bill). Amendments to the text of the Bill can also be debated and voted on.

However, an important procedural difference between the two Houses is that the Lords cannot take oral and written evidence at Committee Stage.

Where will Committee Stage take place?

In the Lords, Committee Stage normally takes one of two forms:

- **Committee of the Whole House:** Held in the main chamber, open to all peers, with the option of divisions (votes) on any question.
- **Grand Committee:** Held in the secondary debating chamber known as the Moses Room. All Peers may attend in principle, but in practice attendance is limited as the smaller room seats fewer members and officials. It typically sits for only four hours per day unless the Usual Channels agree an extension. There are no division lobbies so formal votes cannot take place; any changes to a Bill must therefore be agreed unanimously.

The decision on which format to use is normally taken immediately after Second Reading, on a motion in the name of the Bill’s sponsor. This motion is amendable, so in theory other peers could push for the alternative form.

For this Bill, Lord Falconer has already given notice that if the Bill receives a Second Reading, he will move that it be committed to a Committee of the Whole House. This is almost certain to be agreed. Committee of the Whole House is generally regarded as superior to Grand Committee and in a Bill of this kind, where few changes are likely to command unanimous support, the option of divisions will almost certainly be necessary. As outlined in the section on select committee scrutiny, this motion could also provide an opportunity to seek to commit the Bill to a select committee (see also page 26). However, if the Committee Stage proceeds as Lord Falconer wishes, then the following procedures will apply.

Opening Committee Stage: what happens first?

Each Committee Stage sitting day starts with the Bill’s sponsor (in this case, Lord Falconer) moving the motion: *“That the House do now resolve itself into a committee upon the bill.”*

This motion must be agreed before proceedings can begin. Opposition is extremely rare, and even if the motion is rejected it is not fatal; the sitting is simply deferred. The motion is technically amendable, for example to delay the stage or change its format, though such amendments are also rare.

Peers sometimes use this motion as a chance to raise broader points, for instance, on the relevance of certain amendments or on general issues the Bill raises.

How are clauses and schedules considered?

Peers must decide whether each clause and schedule should “stand part” of the Bill. The clauses are normally considered in the order that they appear in the Bill, followed by the schedules, unless the House agrees an instruction to adopt an alternative order of consideration. It is common, for example, for the House to agree an instruction to consider each of the schedules after the clauses to which they relate, rather than taking all the schedules at the end.

Key features of the process

- Clauses and schedules are only voted on once all the proposed amendments to them have been decided. If an amendment is made, the question that the Committee will vote on is “*That the clause as amended stand part of the bill*”.
- Where several consecutive clauses attract no amendments, the questions on them can be put together “en bloc”. Peers may still intervene to speak to one of the clauses, or table a last-minute amendment without notice, though courtesy requires warning the chair in advance.
- If a peer wishes to oppose a clause altogether (vote against a motion that the clause “stand part” of the Bill), they are expected to give notice of their intention by tabling a statement of their intention to oppose it.

How are amendments published and arranged?

Amendments can be tabled at any time after Second Reading, even during recess. They can also be tabled while Committee Stage is underway, as long as they relate to clauses or schedules which have not yet been considered.

Publication follows a two-step process:

- **Daily sheets:** Published the next working day, listing amendments without numbers. The amendments may have up to four named supporters and a short explanatory note summarising the purpose of the proposed change.⁴²
- **Marshalled lists:** Issued on the working day before each sitting, assigning numbers to amendments and arranging them in the order they apply to the Bill.

Supplementary daily sheets and revised marshalled lists are issued as new amendments are tabled. These are published on the dedicated Bill page on the parliamentary website under the sub-heading “Amendment papers”.

The Bill’s amendment papers can be difficult to navigate, with different labelling depending on the stage and date.

Below are examples of how the papers will be labelled on the Bill page:

- **Daily sheet (before first marshalled list):** HL Bill 112 Running list of amendments – 14 October 2025⁴³

⁴² The names of up to five supporters may appear next to an amendment if one of the supporters is the sponsor of the Bill.

⁴³ HL Bill 112 is the number given to the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill in the House of Lords this Session.

- **Marshalled list before first sitting:** HL Bill 112-I Marshalled List for Committee
- **First daily sheet after first marshalled list:** HL Bill 112-I(a) Amendments for Committee (Supplementary to the Marshalled List)
- **Second daily sheet after first marshalled list:** HL Bill 112-I(b) Amendments for Committee (Supplementary to the Marshalled List)
- **Marshalled list before second sitting:** HL Bill 112-II Second Marshalled List for Committee
- **First daily sheet after second marshalled list:** HL Bill 112-II(a) Amendments for Committee (Supplementary to the Second Marshalled List)

Amendments are always ordered according to where they apply in the Bill. Technical rules cover how multiple amendments to the same line are prioritised, as set out in the House of Lords Companion to the Standing Orders.⁴⁴

What kind of amendments are admissible?

Unlike in the Commons, neither the Lord Speaker nor any other House authority can decide whether an amendment is admissible. Only the House itself can decide whether an amendment is in order.

The following rules are generally observed:

- **Scope/subject-matter:** Amendments and new clauses must be relevant to the subject-matter of the Bill. Amendments must also be relevant to the clause or schedule that they would amend. Amendments to a schedule must not go beyond the scope of the clause that introduces it.
- **Previous decision:** Amendments must not be inconsistent with a previous decision taken at the same stage (for example, on another amendment).
- **Financial privilege:** Amendments to Bills originating in the House of Commons are normally discouraged if they would impose new taxation or spending without Commons approval (i.e., not covered by a Money resolution or a Ways and Means resolution), unless there is reason to believe the Commons will pass the necessary resolution.

The clerks in the Legislation Office advise peers on the admissibility of amendments. This advice is usually accepted, but peers can still table an amendment against the advice of the clerks. If this happens, the Leader of the House will highlight the clerks' advice during the debate, leaving the House to decide.

Last-minute amendments are permitted in exceptional circumstances. They are known as manuscript amendments and are discouraged because Members are given no notice of them on the amendment paper. They are generally used to correct obvious errors to amendments which have already been tabled.

How are amendments debated and decided?

⁴⁴ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2025, para. 8.71

To streamline debate and avoid repetition, related amendments are grouped together for debate by the Government Whips' office, in consultation with the Peers who proposed them.

- Grouping only affects the order of debate, not the order of decision. Amendments are always voted on in the order they appear on the marshalled list.
- A later amendment may be debated alongside an earlier one but will still only be decided when its place on the marshalled list is reached.
- If the first amendment in a group is rejected, later amendments in the group will not necessarily be rejected as well. Conversely, the same applies when the first amendment in a group is agreed.
- Groupings suggested by the Whips are not binding. A Peer may still demand their amendment be debated separately from a group and can insist that it be separated.
- Groupings are not binding, even when they have been published. A Peer can still insist on debating an amendment separately from its group when the amendment is reached on the marshalled list. However, this "de-grouping" is strongly discouraged.
- Amendments may also be decided "en bloc" if they meet certain conditions: they appear consecutively on the marshalled list, they all relate to the same clause or schedule, they have all been debated, and no peer objects to them being decided together. If a division is required, however, it must be taken on the first amendment only.
- Divisions cannot occur on a single question covering multiple amendments. If peers object to such a question – that is, they want the amendments all rejected – the practice is for the first amendment to be decided separately by a division. If that first amendment is rejected, then the other amendments in the group are normally not moved, so no further question arises, and all the other amendments fall. If the first amendment is agreed, then the other amendments are normally moved en bloc and agreed without further debate or division.

INFORMATION: Does the grouping of amendments for debate affect the order in which they are decided?

The effect of grouping is simply that all the amendments in a group are debated alongside the first amendment in the group on the marshalled list (even if this is a minor or consequential amendment). An amendment that applies late in the Bill ("amendment 101"), and therefore appears near the end of the marshalled list, may be grouped for debate with an amendment that applies earlier in the Bill ("amendment 1"). Assuming peers stick to the grouping, peers would discuss the amendment 101 when amendment 1 is reached on the marshalled list. However, the order in which amendments are decided depends on the marshalled list. Therefore, while amendment 1 would be decided at the end of the debate on the group containing both amendment 1 and amendment 101, amendment 101 may not be voted on until several sittings later when its place on the marshalled list is reached.

What rules and conventions apply at Committee Stage?

Peers often table “probing amendments”, not to force a vote but to “probe” and press the Minister (or sponsor) for clarification or commitments.

Because defeated amendments cannot be reintroduced at Report Stage, Peers usually withdraw amendments at Committee Stage that they know will not pass, to preserve the option of returning to the issue at Report Stage. As a result, divisions at Committee Stage are quite rare: between 2015 and 2024, only 22 divisions took place at Committee – an average of around three per Session – compared with 602 at Report.

However, the assisted dying bill is not a Government Bill, so if those wishing to amend it think that they are likely to succeed in relation to a particular amendment at Committee Stage, they may well press their amendment at this point, the more so if they wish to be seen as seeking to improve rather than merely delay the bill.

Another key feature of Committee Stage is that Peers may speak more than once to the same question – unlike at other stages of a Bill – allowing for a more discursive style of debate.

How long could Committee Stage last?

Unlike in the House of Commons, where “programme orders” set fixed deadlines for each stage of a Bill, there is no such timetable in the Lords. Committee Stage has no “out-date” and can, in theory, continue indefinitely until every clause and amendment has been considered.

For uncontroversial Bills, Committee Stage might be wrapped up in a day or two. But for larger or contentious measures, it can stretch much longer. Since 2010, four Bills have had Committee Stages lasting 15 days or more:

- Welfare Reform Bill (2010-12): 17 days
- Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill (2010-12): 17 days
- Health and Social Care Bill (2010-12): 15 days
- Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (2022-23): 15 days

Why does it take so long? Sometimes the sheer size or complexity of a Bill demands this level of detailed scrutiny.

But prolonged Committee Stages are also often the result of deliberate delaying tactics. Even a small group of peers can slow things down significantly by:

- tabling large numbers of amendments;
- encouraging many speakers to contribute;
- splitting groups of amendments for debate into smaller groups; and
- making lengthy speeches.

What happens if progress stalls?

It often becomes clear after only a couple of sittings that a Committee Stage will drag on. This is what happened in 2014 with Lord Falconer’s Assisted Dying Bill (see also the section ‘Five ways the House of Lords can say no to the Bill’). After two sittings, peers had made so

little headway - and tabled so many new amendments – that the House ended up with 50 more amendments to deal with than when it began Committee Stage. No further sittings were scheduled.

A determined minority of peers could table hundreds of amendments to this Bill and insist on lengthy debate.

Since 2010, 28 Bills have attracted more than 500 amendments and four have seen over 1,000 proposed amendments.⁴⁵ All of these were Government Bills, where ministers could grant more time. For a Private Member's Bill, where time is scarcer, such tactics could prove fatal.

Moreover, if Peers become frustrated that a particular sitting is going on too long, they may seek to move a 'dilatory motion' to end the sitting: *"that the House be resumed"*. Such a motion may be moved by any Peer and, if agreed, the sitting will end. When Committee Stage resumes at a subsequent sitting, it proceeds from the point at which the previous sitting ended.

⁴⁵ This data includes amendments from both Committee and Report Stage. The House of Lords [Public Bill statistics](#), from which these figures are taken, does not provide separate data for Committee and Report Stage amendments, though the statistics indicate that approximately two-thirds of amendments are tabled at Committee Stage.

Report Stage

At Report Stage, the whole House debates and votes on amendments to a Bill. Unlike Committee Stage, there is no need to agree that each clause or schedule should “stand part” of the Bill. At Report Stage, the focus is purely on amendments.

With a Government Bill, it is at this stage that amendments opposed by the Minister are most likely to succeed, including changes that could significantly alter or even undermine the Bill’s purpose

However, the assisted dying bill is not a Government Bill so those Peers wishing to make an amendment to remedy a deficiency in it will have to carefully judge whether this is most likely to be achieved at Report Stage or earlier in Committee.

Opening Report Stage: What happens first?

The first sitting of Report begins when the Bill’s sponsor, Lord Falconer, moves *“That the report be now received.”*

If more than one day is needed, later sittings begin with the motion *“That the Bill be now further considered on Report.”*

These motions are technically debatable and amendable (for example, to seek to postpone the sitting), though in practice this rarely happens.

Debate starts once the first amendment on the marshalled list has been moved, and ends only when every amendment has been decided.

How are amendments published and arranged?

The process for publishing and arranging amendments on the marshalled list is identical to that at Committee Stage. Amendments are published on running daily sheets and formally arranged into marshalled lists the day before each sitting. New amendments are added to fresh marshalled lists as Report stage progresses.

The amendment papers take the following format:

- **Daily sheet (before first marshalled list):** HL Bill 112 Running list of amendments – [insert date – e.g., 30 October 2025]
- **Marshalled list before first sitting:** HL Bill 112-I Marshalled List for Report
- **First daily sheet after first marshalled list:** HL Bill 112-I(a) Amendments for Report (Supplementary to the Marshalled List)
- **Second daily sheet after first marshalled list:** HL Bill 112-I(b) Amendments for Report (Supplementary to the Marshalled List)
- **Marshalled list before second sitting:** HL Bill 112-II Second Marshalled List for Report
- **First daily sheet after second marshalled list:** HL Bill 112-II(a) Amendments for Report (Supplementary to the Second Marshalled List)

What kind of amendments are admissible?

The same basic rules apply as at Committee Stage, but with three important differences:

- **Repeat amendments:** Amendments identical to or of identical effect as those already rejected in Committee are inadmissible. An amendment must be more than “cosmetically different” to be considered again.
- **Reversing Committee decisions:** Amendments agreed in Committee cannot be overturned at Report unless the whole House agrees unanimously.
- **Removing clauses or schedules:** At Committee Stage, amendments to leave out a clause are out of order, since Peers need only give notice of their intention to oppose the question that a clause “stand part” of the Bill. This does not apply at Report Stage, where the only way to oppose a clause is by an amendment. However, if the clause had been agreed by a vote in Committee, it cannot be removed at Report except by the unanimous agreement of the House.

As at Committee Stage, a Peer can persist in seeking to table an amendment even where the House authorities advise that it is inadmissible, since only the House itself can decide whether an amendment is out of order.

How are amendments debated and decided?

Debate at Report follows many of the same conventions as in Committee, but with one key difference: the one-speech rule applies. No Peer may speak more than once on the same question, except that (i) the mover of an amendment has a right to reply at the end of a debate, and (ii) a Minister, sponsor, or other Member seeking to explain a material point of their speech may contribute a second time with the agreement of the House.

Other features mirror Committee Stage:

- **Groupings affect only debate, not decision:** Votes are always taken in the order amendments appear on the marshalled list.
- **Order of consideration:** Amendments are decided in the order they appear on the marshalled list, which reflects the order in which they apply to the Bill. Related amendments are arranged into groups for debate by the Whips’ Office, in consultation with Peers, to streamline the discussion and avoid unnecessary repetition.
- **Non-binding:** The groupings are not binding, and a Peer can insist that their amendment be separated from the group.
- **Decisions on each amendment:** Rejecting or agreeing to one amendment in the group does not mean rejecting or agreeing to all the other amendments in the group; Peers may vote differently on each amendment in a group.
- **Deciding amendments “en bloc”:** Amendments which appear consecutively on the marshalled list can be agreed en bloc (that is, together in a single question), though unlike at Committee Stage, the amendments need not apply to the same clause or schedule. Amendments cannot be agreed en bloc in a division; as at Committee Stage, if a division is necessary it takes place on the first amendment, and the rest are taken en bloc without a division.

How long could Report Stage last?

Like Committee Stage, Report Stage is not programmed and has no fixed time limit. It ends only when every amendment on the marshalled list has been decided.

A common rule of thumb is that Report Stage takes about half as many days as Committee Stage. But this is not guaranteed, especially for long or contentious Bills. The number of days is usually settled through agreement between the party whips, though it can always slip if the debate moves slowly.

Third Reading

In the House of Commons, Third Reading takes the form of short debate on a single motion *“That the bill be now read a third time”*, where no further amendments to the Bill itself can be made. Third Reading in the House of Lords is more complicated. Unlike in the Commons, there are three stages to passing a Bill at Third Reading:

- **Third Reading:** The House first votes on a motion *“That the Bill be now read a third time.”* Unlike in the House of Commons, this is almost always taken formally and without debate or division and is not seen as an opportunity to block further passage of the Bill.
- **Amendments:** Once Third Reading is agreed, amendments may be moved to the bill. Amendments at this stage are only permitted for very limited purposes and are not an opportunity to debate a Bill’s provisions again.
- **Passing the bill:** Once the House has disposed of any amendments, it must agree a further motion *“That this Bill do now pass”*. This motion is debatable and is a more appropriate stage for peers to oppose a Bill. The debate provides the House with an opportunity to review the final text of the Bill. However, it is not an opportunity to re-open debates from previous stages, such as the Bill’s underlying principles or purposes, which were agreed by the House at Second Reading, and remarks ought to be brief.

What kinds of amendments are admissible at Third Reading?

The purpose of allowing amendments at Third Reading is to provide an opportunity to “tidy up” a Bill, and not to re-examine major differences which were resolved at earlier stages. Specifically, amendments are generally only admissible for three limited purposes:⁴⁶

- to clarify any remaining uncertainties;
- to improve the drafting; and
- to allow the Government, or the sponsor, to fulfil undertakings given at earlier stages.

As at other stages, the clerks will advise whether an amendment is out of order. If they advise as such, a peer may insist on tabling the amendment anyway, but the clerks would draw their advice to the attention of the House. It would then be for the House to decide whether to agree to the amendment.

Manuscript amendments – amendments of which no notice is given – are strictly out of order at this stage. Notice of an amendment must be given by at least the preceding working day.

Opposing the passage of a Bill

If a peer wishes to oppose passage of a Bill, it is conventional for them to do so by tabling an amendment to the effect that *“this House declines to allow the Bill to pass...”*, rather than by voting against the motion directly.

⁴⁶ *Erskine May’s Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 25th edition, 2019 (London: Butterworths/LexisNexis), [para. 29.65](#)

However, such amendments, and divisions on them, are rare. Since 2010, there have been only five divisions on amendments to the motion that the Bill do now pass, none of which succeeded and all but one of which were rejected overwhelmingly.

- Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill (21 January 2021): The fatal amendment was rejected by 440 votes to 29.⁴⁷
- European Union (Future Relationship) Bill (30 December 2020): The fatal amendment was rejected by 466 votes to 101.⁴⁸
- European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill (7 March 2017): The fatal amendment was rejected by 340 votes to 95.⁴⁹
- High Speed Rail (London–West Midlands) Bill (31 January 2017): The fatal amendment was rejected by 385 votes to 25.⁵⁰
- Health and Social Care Bill (19 March 2012): The fatal amendment was rejected by 269 votes to 174.⁵¹

Alternatively, peers can table a non-fatal amendment, expressing a regret or concern about the passage of a Bill without blocking it. This could take the form “that the Bill do now pass, but that this House regrets that...”.

⁴⁷ House of Lords, Hansard, [21 January 2021](#), vol. 809, col. 1294

⁴⁸ House of Lords, Hansard, [30 December 2020](#), vol. 808, col. 1926

⁴⁹ House of Lords, Hansard, [7 March 2017](#), vol. 779, col. 1340

⁵⁰ House of Lords, Hansard, [31 January 2017](#), vol. 778, col. 1096

⁵¹ House of Lords, Hansard, [19 March 2012](#), vol. 736, col. 706