

Member Briefing: Session 4

What's the future we want to see for MPs' role and how might pay and funding support that?

Introduction

In the fourth meeting of the Forum, we will explore **how MPs and their offices can best support democracy going forward and what that might mean for pay and funding.**

How this will work

In the meeting, you will hear from experts:

Meg Russell, Professor of Democratic Politics at UCL | How are parliament, and expectations around MPs and democracy, changing?

Dr Alexandra Meakin, Lecturer in British Politics at University of Leeds | What do we want or expect from our MPs going forward?

Dr Nick Dickinson, Lecturer in Politics at University of Exeter | Modernising MPs' roles and offices, what's being discussed and the role of pay and funding to support that

After the speakers' talks, you'll discuss what you heard in small groups. A facilitator will guide the conversation and help capture your thoughts and questions. If there is time, the experts may answer some questions during the session. Other questions may be answered later.

What we know

Like many countries, the UK has seen a decline in trust in both politicians and our governing system with 1 in 2 people saying they are not very or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in the UK ([IPSOS](#)). Only 19% of the British public think the current system of governing Britain needs little or no improvement ([National Centre for Social Research](#)).

[Research from The Constitution Unit](#) emphasised two main themes:

- People value honesty and integrity in politics, and place more importance on this than on 'getting things done', and
- People want government power to be constrained through strong 'checks and balances', including stronger scrutiny in parliament.

When considering what a good representative democracy looks like, the [Citizens' Assembly on Democracy](#) wanted those elected to have a stronger relationship with their constituents and to

better represent their views, including a way for people to more directly influence what gets debated in parliament via their MPs.

What could shape the future?

Several potential changes could affect the role and make up of MPs in the future, including:

Type of change	Description
A more representative Parliament	Currently, Parliament doesn't reflect the diversity of the UK population. Campaigns are pushing for changes to make it easier for women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, and those from working-class backgrounds to become MPs. This includes practical changes like better wheelchair access and childcare support, i.e. arrangements that would remove barriers preventing diverse candidates from serving.
Strengthening Parliament's power relative to the Government	This means giving MPs more control over what Parliament discusses and stronger tools to challenge government decisions. For example, allowing MPs to set more of Parliament's agenda rather than just debating what the Government chooses, or giving Parliamentary Committees more power to investigate and act on government failures.
Public participation	This means giving ordinary citizens more direct say in government decisions, beyond just voting every few years. Examples include citizens' assemblies (like this Forum), public consultations on major policies, and community-led research projects. MPs' pay and funding could support this by funding specialist staff in MPs' offices who can organize and facilitate public engagement, or by ring-fencing budgets specifically for community consultation work.
Increased devolution	This means moving decision-making power away from Westminster to local and regional authorities - like city mayors, county councils, and devolved parliaments. For MPs, this could mean their job changes significantly. In Wales, for example, MPs can't help constituents with NHS issues because health is handled by the Welsh Parliament, not Westminster. More devolution could mean MPs focus more on truly national issues while local politicians handle local services.
Extending the vote and improving MP Office capabilities	Lowering the voting age to 16 highlights a broader challenge: how do MPs' offices develop the skills and experience needed to serve all constituents effectively? This isn't just about engaging young people - it's about whether MPs have access to staff with the right expertise, whether that's youth engagement, digital communication, policy analysis, or

	community organizing. Currently, many MPs rely on young, inexperienced staff because that's who they can afford.
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What do we need to consider?

The question we are considering through this Forum is '**How should MPs' pay and funding best support our democracy?**'. In this session we are considering how pay and funding can support the democracy we would most like to see in the future.

When it comes to the future of MPs' roles, some people point to the need for modernisation and efficiency. For example, how reforming working practices might make it more possible for Parliament to be representative of more of the population, or how technology might reduce the need to travel between Westminster and constituencies.

Others look to wider democratic reform and what this might mean for MPs' roles - things like how we can create more opportunities for youth and wider participation or how MPs could play a greater role in creating policy and scrutinising the work of Government.

How might pay and funding evolve to meet changing needs?

Some examples of how MP support could adapt to new challenges include:

- **Digital engagement expertise:** As politics increasingly happens online, should MP offices have dedicated social media and digital engagement specialists to help MPs connect with younger constituents and counter misinformation?
- **Specialised policy support:** With issues becoming more complex (e.g. climate, AI), should there be shared pools of expert staff that MPs can access, rather than each MP hiring generalists?
- **Community facilitation skills:** If we want more public participation in democracy, should MP offices be funded to employ community organisers and facilitators who can run citizens' assemblies and local consultation processes?
- **Accessibility and inclusion support:** To make Parliament more representative, should funding specifically support interpreters, accessibility coordinators, and childcare - recognising that being an MP shouldn't require existing wealth or conventional life circumstances?

However, any changes involve trade-offs. Higher pay and funding means more taxpayer money spent on MPs rather than public services. More specialised staff might mean MPs become more distant from day-to-day constituent concerns. Centralised support systems could reduce MPs' independence. And focusing funding on new capabilities might mean less support for MPs' current core work.

These aren't prescriptive solutions, but examples of how pay and funding structures could evolve - and the choices we'd need to make about what we prioritise.

A few starting questions

What does a good democracy look like?

What role can MPs play in supporting the democracy we want to see?

What should MPs be doing more or less of?

What changes to MPs' pay and funding, if any, do you think would better support the democracy you want to see?

Key words & concepts

Below are some key words and concepts that you might hear. You don't need to memorise these, but you may find it helpful to look back at them throughout the session.

Key word or concept	What it means
Deliberative democracy	A form of governance where decisions are made through deliberate discussion and debate among citizens. It focuses on informed consent, mutual respect, and the weighing of different perspectives.
Democratic reform	The process of improving or strengthening democratic institutions and practices. The goal is to enhance citizen participation, increase accountability and transparency, and ensure a more representative democracy. This can involve changes to electoral systems, voting rights, political finance, and the structure of government itself.
Devolution	The process of shifting decision-making authority from the central government to national, regional, and local authorities.
Electoral reform	Changes to how elections work. For example, switching from first-past-the-post (where whoever gets the most votes wins outright) to proportional representation (where parties get seats based on their share of the total vote). This can dramatically change which parties get into Parliament and how well election results reflect what voters actually want.
Public participation	The inclusion of members of the public in organisations or events, often related to decision-making processes.

Representation

The idea that MPs should act on behalf of their constituents' interests and views in Parliament. This raises questions about whether MPs should always vote according to what their constituents want, or use their own judgment about what's best for the constituency and country.