



The **WORK** *of an* **MP**

What is an MP? What is Parliament? What is the House of Commons? How do you become an MP?





- What does MP stand for?
- What is Parliament?
- What is the House of Commons?
- How do you become an MP?
- What is the Government?
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- What is a General Election?
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- What is a backbencher?

The first palace at Westminster was built by Edward the Confessor. However most of the building you see today was built in the 19th century after a fire in 1834 destroyed the old palace.

The WORK *of an* MP

This booklet is going to describe the working life of a Back Bench Member of Parliament.

Before we describe the work of an MP, we thought there were some questions (*see opposite*) about parliament which you might like to try and answer. You will find the answers elsewhere in the booklet.

Good Luck!



What does MP stand for?

MP stands for Member of Parliament



It is difficult to describe the work of an MP because no two MPs choose to do their job in exactly the same way.

To begin with, MPs must divide their time between the area they represent (a constituency) and the Palace of Westminster in London.

Sometimes the constituency is a long way from London. Sometimes it is not far away at all.

In their constituency the MP tries to help everyone – it doesn't matter how they voted at a General Election, or whether they voted at all!



Jeremy Corbyn MP addressing his constituents.

Julie Kirkbride MP meeting local children.



What is Parliament?

Parliament is the body which decides the laws of the country and debates the way the country should be governed.

People in a constituency have the chance to meet their MP when they can

talk about their problems, large or small. MPs often call this a surgery.

In country areas MPs may have to travel many miles to see their constituents.

Different sorts of problems are discussed during these surgeries. People may come to their MP with problems such as:

- Housing
- Financial
- Medical
- Transport
- Employment
- Education
- (and many more)



? What is the House of Commons?
The House of Commons is the elected Chamber in Parliament.



Simon Hughes MP at his constituency surgery.

Often, the MP has to take up problems brought to his or her surgery with Government Departments. Some problems can be referred to the local Council but an MP is usually the person regarded as 'the problem solver'.

People also come to surgeries to discuss all kinds of things like football hooliganism, animal cruelty, green issues, closing of schools.

An MP also spends time at weekends, and during holidays, meeting people in local factories, clubs, schools and opening local events.

Ann Winterton MP visiting a local primary school.



How do you become an MP?

To become an MP you have to win an election. Britain is divided into 659 areas, called constituencies, and one MP is elected to represent each constituency.

Of course, MPs also have to take part in work that goes on at Westminster and this is a very important aspect of their duties.

What is the Government?

The Government is the Ministers chosen from the party (or parties) which has the largest number of MPs in the House of Commons after a General Election.

Who chooses the Government?

The Prime Minister.

The working hours of the House of Commons can be long. Most MPs start their day early in the morning and may not get home until midnight or later.

It is important for MPs to keep up with the news – so the first thing they do in the morning is to look at the newspaper to know what has been happening overnight both in this country and abroad. MPs often do this over their breakfast.

MPs also need to read their copy of Hansard which sets out everything that happened the previous day on the floor of the House of Commons and their Order Paper for the day's business ahead.

Hansard is available for the public to buy from The Stationery Office or from bookshops and is also accessible on the internet.

Steven Twigg MP in the Library.

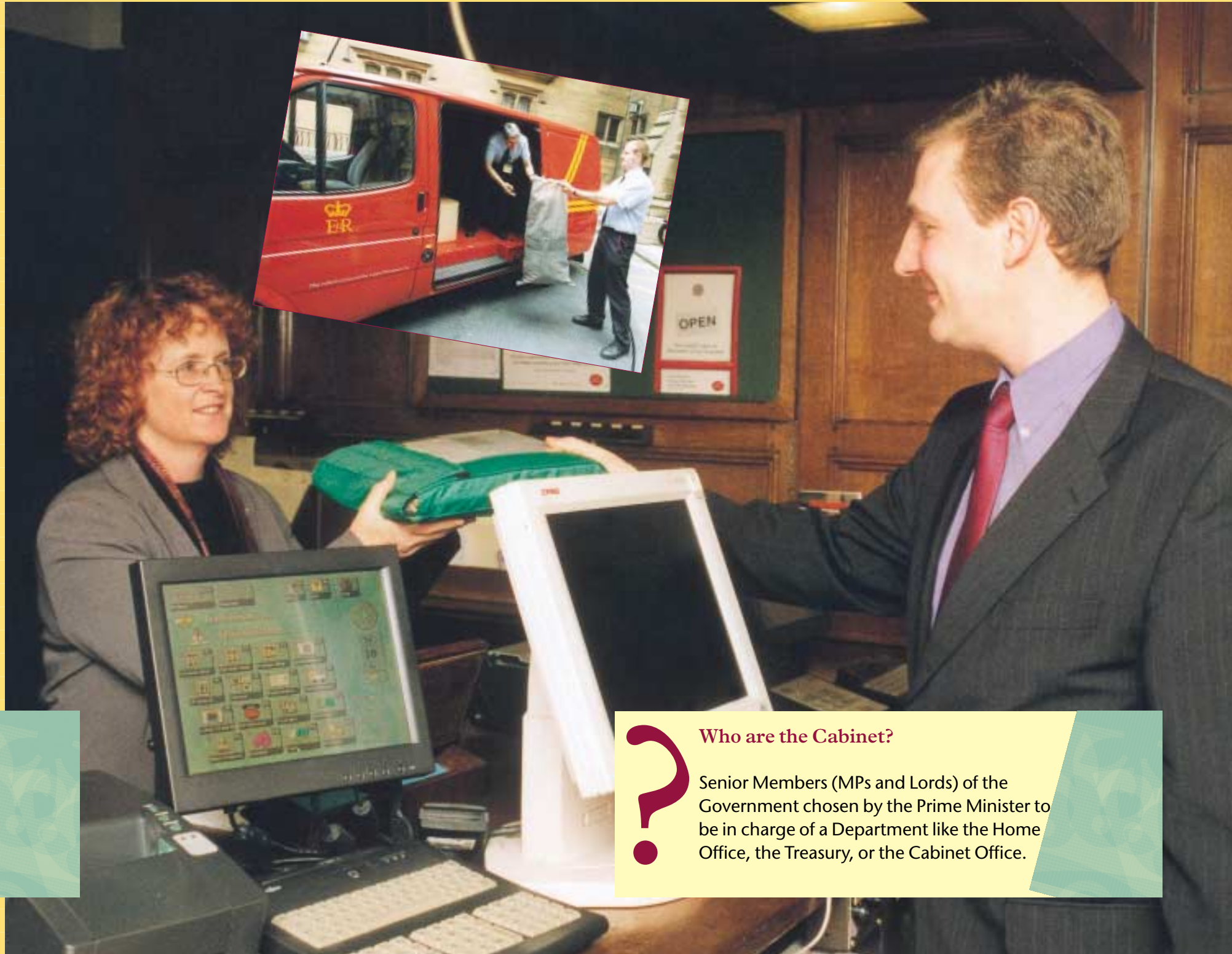
Nicholas Soames MP having a working breakfast.



The first thing MPs do after arriving at the House of Commons is to collect their mail. MPs receive huge amounts of mail every day; so an early visit to the Mail Room in the House of Commons is important. Reading and answering letters takes up a large amount of an MP's time.

MPs and their staff also receive e-mails which, like letters, are often about the same kind of problems as the ones discussed at the surgery, but MPs also receive many letters from businesses, trade unions or from groups who might be supporting a particular cause. These groups could be asking MPs to help influence the government so as to change policies on things such as the National Health Service, student loans, public transport and foreign policy.

In this way MPs act as a link for their constituents with Government Ministers when issues that are raised locally can be discussed in Parliament.



Who is the Prime Minister?
The leader of the governing party.

Judy Mallaber MP, collecting her mail

Who are the Cabinet?
Senior Members (MPs and Lords) of the Government chosen by the Prime Minister to be in charge of a Department like the Home Office, the Treasury, or the Cabinet Office.

Sometimes, people or groups of people come to Westminster to talk to their MPs on a particular subject – this is called lobbying. Teachers, nurses, firemen, disabled groups might all come to talk about their pay, for example.



From tea time until about 10.00 pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and until 7.00pm on Thursdays there are debates in which MPs may try to speak, especially if the subjects are of interest to their constituents. Not all MPs are in the House of Commons all of the time, but they have to stay in or around Westminster most of the time from Mondays to Thursdays, as at any moment a vote may be called.

If they live near enough, MPs may return to meetings in their constituencies. Otherwise, they will often be working at their desks or in the Library of the House of Commons.

Phil Hope MP,
Phil Sawford MP
and Angela Smith MP dealing
with
Parliamentary business.

On some mornings, an MP may lead tours of the Houses of Parliament for local schools, or organisations in the constituency who have asked to be shown around Westminster.

Often MPs will use their lunch time to talk to other MPs about policies. Sometimes they may have lunch in one of the many Dining Rooms in the House of Commons with people from outside Parliament who wish to meet a particular MP, and sometimes they will be invited out to lunch to talk to members of the public who may be interested in a particular subject.

Owen Paterson MP with a group of students during a tour of the Houses of Parliament.



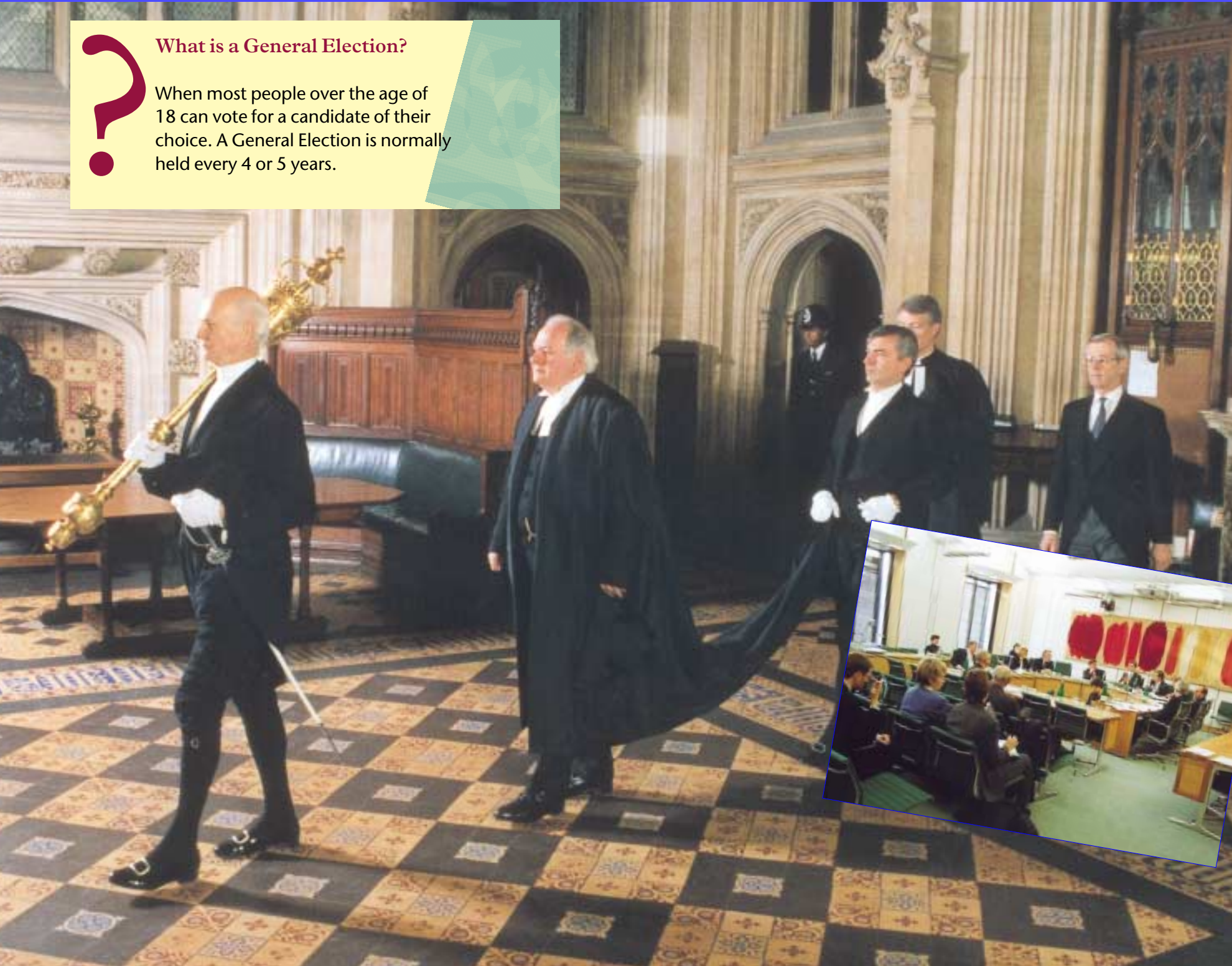
How do you get elected as an MP?

You have to get the most votes in a constituency at an election. But first that person, to have a chance of winning, has to be chosen by the local party to be their candidate in a General Election.



What is a General Election?

When most people over the age of 18 can vote for a candidate of their choice. A General Election is normally held every 4 or 5 years.



The first hour of the afternoon from 2.30 to 3.30 pm is Question Time and on Thursdays 11.30 to 12.30, MPs like to be present then because they have a chance to ask the Government detailed questions about what it is doing or not doing – and why?

On Wednesdays between 3.00 and 3.30 pm the chamber is full when MPs have the chance to ask the Prime Minister questions.

MPs often have to meet and talk to people who can advise them on the important issues of the day. On Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, many MPs will be sitting on Committees (either Standing Committees, which examine proposed legislation (Bills) in detail, or Select Committees which inquire into all aspects of the work of Government).



A Select Committee taking evidence from witnesses in Portcullis House – the new Parliamentary building.

At 10.00p.m., or earlier, on most evenings MPs like to be in the chamber.

This is when they will have to decide whether to vote for or against a particular issue. They do this by walking through one of the Division Lobbies (The Aye or Noe Lobby) on either side of the Chamber and being counted as they come out.

A Division can be called at any time when the House is sitting, even in the middle of the night, and MPs have to be ready to vote, sometimes at short notice. This applies to all Members if there is a 3 line Whip – including the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition.

Occasionally debates can, and do continue well into the night – and sometimes into the next day, which means that MPs can arrive home very late. However, some new rules have recently been introduced to help MPs work more realistic hours which is why Thursday's hours have become a little shorter.



What happens after a General Election?

After a General Election the Queen asks the leader of the winning party to become Prime Minister and to choose their Government.

By the time a Member finally gets to bed it can sometimes be nearly time to begin the next day's work.

As you will have seen from this book a Member of Parliament leads a very busy life – doing lots of different things and needing to know the answers to lots of different sorts of problems; so keeping fit is essential. Therefore MPs try to fit in a visit to the Westminster Gymnasium for work-out sessions!

Do you think that you would be fit enough to live the life of an MP?

Lembit Öpik MP in his office overlooking the River Thames.

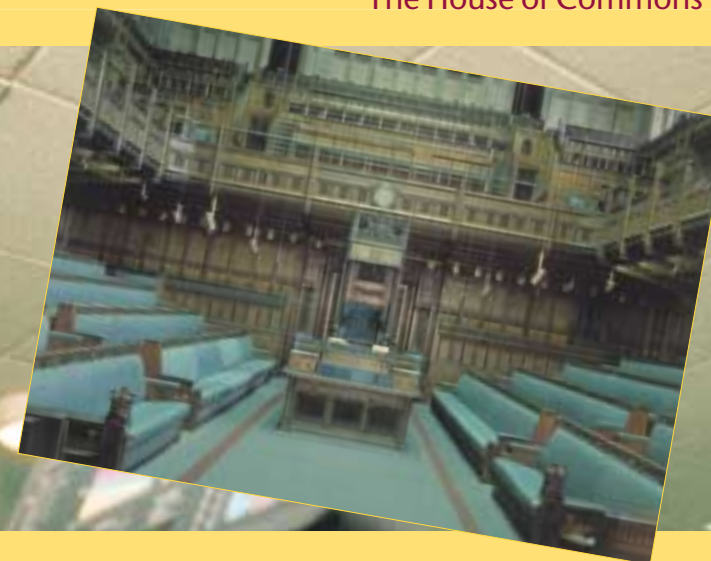


What is a Back Bencher?

Back Benchers are MPs who are not members of the Government or one of the MPs chosen to speak on behalf of the opposition parties.



The House of Commons Chamber.



This is the end of the quiz. **How did you get on?** I hope that you enjoyed trying to answer the questions.

More information can be obtained from:

**Parliamentary Education Unit,
Room 604,
Norman Shaw Building (North),
London, SW1A 2TT**

Tel: 020 7219 2105

Fax: 020 7219 0818

E-mail: edunit@parliament.uk

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