



Swearing in of Members at the start of a Parliament: a note for Members

This note explains the process of swearing in, which all Members must do at the start of the new Parliament. It sets out the process and explains its importance.

When does swearing in take place?

1. The House of Commons will first meet in the new Parliament at 2.30pm on Tuesday 13 June to elect a Speaker. If the former Speaker is re-elected that day, the House will then meet at 2.30pm on Wednesday 14 June. There will be no prayers. The Speaker elect will go with Black Rod to the Lords to receive the Royal Approbation. On returning from the Lords, the Speaker swears in.
2. After this, the swearing in process begins. The annex to this note gives the words of the oath and of the affirmation. The recital of the oath or affirmation has legal effect. Members take the oath/affirm in an established order: first the Father of the House, then members of the Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet, other privy counsellors and other Ministers. Other Members are then called by length of service. The Speaker announces the timings at the start of proceedings; and as swearing in continues the annunciator will display the relevant details (as TAKING THE OATH: MEMBERS FIRST ELECTED IN 1997–2001 PARLIAMENT), allowing you to see when it is time for you to swear in. (If you have broken service you should swear in with other Members elected to the Parliament when your period of continuous service began, rather than the Parliament to which you were first elected.) If you miss the allotted time, you can still swear in later on.
3. Subject to the election and decision of the Speaker, the House is likely to meet for swearing in on Wednesday 14 June and Thursday 15 June. After the first day of swearing in, swearing in takes place immediately after prayers. Detailed times will be announced by the Speaker on the first day of swearing in. It is unlikely that new Members will be sworn in on the first day.

What happens

4. The swearing in process is as follows:
 - Members enter the Chamber from Member's lobby which is at the far end of the Chamber from the Speaker's Chair, and queue at the Bar of the House.
 - Members should proceed one by one to the despatch box. Since this proceeding is televised live, it is the first opportunity for the broadcasters to identify a new Member in the House. Members who wish to do so can assist the broadcasters by stating their name and constituency when they come to the despatch box. This is not a requirement of the House but it will help the broadcasters to get the correct name when new Members subsequently speak in the House.
 - The Clerk at the despatch box will offer a choice of affirmation or oath cards to read. If you wish to swear on a sacred text, your chosen text will be provided. You then take the oath or affirm.
 - Next move on to the Clerk at the end of the Table. Give him or her your name, sign the Test Roll, and write the name of your constituency next to your signature.
 - The Clerk of the House will then call out your name. You should go to the Speaker's Chair, shake hands with the Speaker, and then move on behind the Chair.
5. House staff will be behind the Speaker's Chair to take a sample signature and to ask how you wish to be known in House documents (such as the Order Paper, Hansard, and on the Annunciator screens)

The Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit will e-mail all Members with a link to an image of their swearing in as well as a link to a video clip which they can download. Members can contact the Broadcasting Unit on x5511 or pru@parliament.uk for further information.

Importance

- Members will be expected to have sworn in before the Queen's Speech on Monday 19 June. If you cannot do so in the first few days of the Parliament you should write to the Speaker, explaining the reason.

Members who have not taken the oath or affirmation may not draw a salary, sit during any debate or vote in a division in the House. A Member, who has not taken the oath and who sits during a debate or votes in a division after the Speaker has been chosen, may be fined £500 but, more importantly, will have to vacate his or her seat.

Annex:

Forms of Oath or/Affirmation

The wording is as follows:

Oath: I swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors, according to law. So help me God.

The manner of administering and taking the oath is prescribed by the Oaths Act 1978. This provides that the person taking the oath holds the sacred text in his or her uplifted hand, and says the words of the oath. The Act also permits the oath to be taken in the Scottish manner, i.e. with uplifted hand but not holding the sacred text.

Alternatively, Members may make a solemn affirmation under the Oaths Acts 1978, using the words:

Affirmation: I do solemnly, sincerely, and truly declare and affirm, That I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors, according to law.

The texts of the oath and affirmation are set out on large cards. As Members take their turn, they should indicate to the Clerk whether they wish to take the oath or affirmation. Texts of the oath and affirmation in Braille are available for Members with impaired sight.

Sacred Texts

The following holy books are available to Members at the Table: the New Testament; the Old Testament (in English and Hebrew); the Old and New Testament combined; the Koran; the Granth; the Gita; the Welsh Bible; the King James Bible; the Jerusalem Bible; the Mormon Bible; the Hebrew Bible; the Torah; the Zohar; and the Dhammapada (by either Sangharakshita or Gil Fronsdal) and the Gaelic Bible. As Members take their turn to take the oath, they should indicate to the Clerk which holy book they require. If you would like advice on this, require another text or would simply like to tell the Clerks in advance what you wish to do, please contact the Journal Office on x3394 or x3320.

Members are asked to respect the protocols surrounding the handling of the Koran, the Granth and the Gita and should not touch these holy books unless they intend to use them to take the oath.

Languages other than English

The oath/affirmation must be taken/made initially in English, but Members are entitled, if they wish, to follow this with an oath or affirmation in Welsh, Scots Gaelic, Irish Gaelic or Cornish. Oath/affirmation cards in these languages are available at the time of swearing in from the Clerk.

Further advice

If you have any questions, please call the Journal Office on x3394 or x3320.