

Press release
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Parliament set to abolish virtual measures brought in during pandemic, MPs and campaigners fear

Almost 7 out of 10 British adults* want MPs to have the chance to participate remotely

Measures allowing MPs to attend Parliamentary business virtually from their constituency or home are under review and likely to be scrapped next month, despite the fact that over two thirds of the electorate support MPs being able to operate more remotely.

Campaigners insist that retaining remote technology will allow MPs to participate while balancing health, home, travel or constituency responsibilities.

Since the first wave of the pandemic MPs have been allowed to take part remotely in House of Commons proceedings to advocate on behalf of their constituents.

This step forward has brought about a welcome change in public perceptions and now, according to a recent YouGov poll nearly 7 out of 10* support its continued use for health, disability or caring reasons.

But in a move which harks back to the olden days, authorities could sweep away parliament-by-zoom next month and replace it with a binary choice - come to Westminster or don't take part in democratic proceedings.

Today the Centenary Action Group is launching **The Remotely Representative House** report, advocating for the new ways of working to be retained when needed.

The **Remotely Representative House** sets out the steps that must be taken to keep parliament-by-zoom and the benefits for MPs including:

- * flexibility if personal circumstances alter due to ill-health, pregnancy, caring responsibilities or travel problems
- * better working arrangements that open the field for more under represented candidates - women, Black, Asian and ethnic minority and disabled people - to stand for election
- * improvements in public perceptions of parliamentarians who are now, more than ever, seen as people like us - juggling home, work and caring responsibilities from their kitchen tables.

The **Remotely Representative House** also argues that unless the 'hybrid parliament' is kept the House will fall far from the best international standards of parliamentary practice.

Helen Pankhurst, Centenary Action Group Convenor said: "It's hard to believe that while the rest of the country is embracing new ways of working through screens, mobiles and laptops Parliament is considering turning its back on the technological innovations ushered in during the pandemic.

'Recently Tracey Crouch was excluded in the debate on Breast Cancer, precisely because she was at home shielding due to having breast cancer herself. This is not something we

should ever have to witness in a 21st so-called democracy - she should have been allowed to contribute from the security of her own front room’.

‘We are not advocating that virtual proceedings should take the place of in-person parliamentary business. But this country desperately needs a more diverse and responsive Parliament and it’s a step back to the dark ages if the measures are now abolished’ she added.

Dr Jess. C. Smith, Lecturer in Politics at Southampton University, and author of the report, says: “With vaccinations offering hope in 2021, The Remotely Representative House, asks the timely question: What lessons can be learnt from these new ways of parliamentary working? The virtues of continuing virtual participation in Parliament hold beyond this time of crisis. The Hybrid Parliament has shown it is possible to accommodate MPs’ need for more modern ways of working. Not only does this have benefits for currently sitting MPs but has the potential to diversity who sits in our Parliament and to transform perceptions - and indeed the reality - of how MPs’ work can be done and by whom. What began as necessary in 2020 is in fact preferable for the future.”

In evidence to the Procedure Committee, Daisy Cooper MP, Liberal Democrats said: “I want a modern workplace where I can operate effectively as somebody with a hidden disability... it needs to be a workplace that is inclusive for everybody. There are conventions in the Chamber that make it not inclusive for everybody and should be got rid of.”

In evidence to the Procedure Committee, Rachel Maskell MP, Labour said: “How long are we going to keep a system that was created centuries ago? We need to make sure that we are a Parliament that sets the world standard — if we are the mother of Parliaments — on how you engage people with underlying health conditions, disabilities and other equality issues.”

Speaking in the Chamber on this issue on 8th June 2020, Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Conservative said: “Those who cannot be here must be allowed to participate and have their voices heard and to represent their constituents. They were elected in exactly the same way as those of us who can be here physically, and they need to be heard.”

Notes

1. ****An exclusive YouGov poll conducted for Centenary Action Group showed that 67% of adults support MPs being allowed to participate remotely in Parliament after the COVID-19 pandemic if unable to attend in person (e.g., for health reasons, caring responsibilities, disability status).**
2. **Figures are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,756 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 10th - 11th February 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).**
3. **The Remotely Representative House will be launched at a Big Tent Ideas event on 24th February 5.30pm. More information: <https://bigtent.org.uk/event/the-remotely-representative-house/>**
4. **Contact Hannah Swirsky, Campaign Coordinator Centenary Action Group on: 07500868422 swirsky@careinternational.org**