

# Lord Foulkes repeats call for Lords reform



On the day when the Conservative Government have finally announced the Dissolution Honours List and another 45 peers have been created, an existing peer, Lord Foulkes of Cumnock, reminded The Edinburgh Reporter that he has been calling for reform of the Upper House for some time. He hopes that on the arrival of the Liberal Democrat peers such as Sir Menzies Campbell and Malcolm Bruce, that reform may now become a reality.

Lord Foulkes is a member of the eight-strong committee which calls for immediate changes to the chamber, and for its transformation into a senate-like vehicle.

In March last year the Labour Peers Working Group issued a paper stating that the chamber needs 'urgent reform' with too many peers and its old-fashioned procedure. But they also claimed that there is much to retain at the same time. The need for a second chamber is obvious in a democracy, and the committee found that the way the Lords works is one of its strengths, as it does not endanger the primary legislative role of the Commons.

The proposal to reform the second chamber into an elected one might be a threat to the Commons, and any further devolution for Scotland and Wales will also affect any prospective reform of the Lords. That said, the committee agreed on some short term reforms which they believe could be put in place immediately without endangering the house's future existence.

The committee recommends that the House of Lords should be restricted to 450 members over time, and that any political parties recommending new peers should do so in a transparent

way. Their view is that nobody should automatically proceed to the Lords as a result of their job or position and they want hereditary peerages ended.

26 out of the 45 new peers announced today have been awarded to 26 Conservatives, but the Labour Peers believe that any political appointments should not mean that any party has a majority in the House of Lords, preferring instead to maintain a 'broad political balance'.

At present there are 781 eligible members of the Lords and of these 192 are women. On average under 500 attend on a daily basis and earn a tax free daily allowance of £300. In 2014/15 the net cost of having the House of Lords in place was just under £100m. By adding 45 new peers today the costs will rise by £1.2m according to the [Electoral Reform Society](#).

The 2014 report calls for a minimum attendance requirement to be imposed and automatic retiral at the age of 80.

The committee was chaired by Julian Grenfell and the report may be read in full below.

Lord Foulkes said: " I have been trying to get this matter debated in the House of Lords for at least a couple of years now, but the Tories have always resisted such a debate. I am so fed up with the situation where Tories pack the House of Lords and such reform is made impossible.

"The Liberal Democrats have signed a motion to reform the Lords, so what they should now do is back the recommendations we made in our report."

Lord Wallace who leads the Liberal Democrat Group in the House of Lords has certainly indicated a willingness to do so. He said yesterday: "We are poised for a number of new peerages to be announced, and I am confident that new colleagues will join me in campaigning for legislation to change the second chamber."



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George Foulkes was a Labour MP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and then South Ayrshire, before becoming MSP for Lothian, and subsequently became Baron Foulkes of Cumnock in 2005. He sits on the board of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and was previously Minister of State for Scotland until 2002.