



# THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER



The Palace of Westminster is also known as the Houses of Parliament or Westminster Palace.

It is situated on the north bank of the River Thames in London.

It is the meeting place of the two houses of the Parliament of the United Kingdom: The House of Lords and The House of Commons.

## THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER – PARLIAMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT

Parliament is different from the Government.

- **The Government** are the people responsible for running the country. The political party that wins the most seats at the General Election takes charge of the Government. The leader of the winning party is appointed as Prime Minister. The Cabinet supports the Prime Minister. The Cabinet is a group made up of senior ministers. The Prime Minister and Cabinet must have their actions approved by Parliament and the Monarch.
- **Parliament** is there to represent the public's interests and make sure that the Government listens. The Government cannot make new laws or raise new taxes without Parliament's agreement. Parliament is made up of people we have elected and people who have been appointed. They sit in two separate Houses: The House of Commons and The House of Lords.

## THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

- The House of Commons is made up of 650 Members of Parliament (MPs) who are elected by the public. They represent the public's views and concerns. MPs consider and propose new laws. They can also examine government policies by asking other ministers questions about current issues.
- Debates usually takes place in a special room called the Commons Chamber. This room is small and decorated in green. There are benches on two sides of the Chamber, divided by a centre aisle. MPs with opposing views sit facing each other on these benches.



## THE HOUSE OF LORDS

- The House of Lords is made up of around 800 members. Members of the House of Lords are not elected by the public. Many of these ladies and gentlemen are appointed by the Queen, usually on the advice of the Prime Minister. Some are not appointed – instead, they inherit their status as a Lord from their family. They are known as hereditary peers. There are currently 92 of these in the House of Lords.
- People serving in the House of Lords have grand titles such as Lord, Viscount, Earl and Baroness. They have experience of working in many different professions such as medicine, law, business and sports.
- The House of Lords has three main roles: it helps to make laws that have been proposed in the House of Commons; it looks after the public's interests; and it holds the government to account.
- The members of the House of Lords sit on red benches. The colour red was apparently chosen because many kings from the past favoured the colour.

## FIND OUT MORE



---

## EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Where is the Palace of Westminster?
  2. What are the names of the two Houses of Parliament in which Members sit?
  3. How many MPs (Members of Parliament) make up the House of Commons?
  4. Describe the Commons Chamber.
  5. What is meant by the term 'hereditary peer'?
-