



The election of the new speaker

Emma Kilheeny looks at the process of electing a new speaker of the House of Commons, and the man himself

On 4 November 2019, after four rounds of voting in a secret ballot lasting 6 hours, MPs elected Sir Lindsay Hoyle as the 159th speaker of the House of Commons, replacing John Bercow.

How is the speaker elected?

Hoyle was elected from a list of seven applicants after Conservative MP Shailesh Vara withdrew in order to

support him. Before the voting commenced, the seven candidates gave speeches limited in length to 5 minutes.

Alternative Vote (AV) was used, allowing MPs to rank the candidates in order of preference. Those receiving the fewest votes (less than 5%) were eliminated from the following ballot and had their second preference votes reallocated to the remaining candidates (see Table 1).

Why did MPs elect Hoyle?

As well as being an experienced MP (for Chorley, since 1997), Hoyle has occupied the role of deputy speaker since 2010. He is one of three deputy speakers that

Table 1 Results from each round of voting*

Candidate	% vote first ballot	% vote second ballot	% vote third ballot	% vote fourth ballot
Sir Lindsay Hoyle (Labour)	37.5	42.4	47.3	60.2
Chris Bryant (Labour)	17.4	20.9	29.9	39.4
Dame Eleanor Laing (Conservative)	20.1	21.2	22.5	Eliminated
Harriet Harman (Labour)	12.8	10.3	Eliminated	Eliminated
Dame Rosie Winterton (Labour)	8.2	5.2	Eliminated	Eliminated
Sir Edward Leigh (Conservative)	2.1	Eliminated	Eliminated	Eliminated
Meg Hillier (Labour)	1.8	Eliminated	Eliminated	Eliminated

* Figures do not include spoiled ballots

stood (along with Dame Eleanor Laing and Dame Rosie Winterton), but the most senior and experienced of the three. While serving as deputy speaker in 2013 Hoyle reprimanded Ed Balls, then shadow chancellor, during the budget debate. He also presided over proceedings after the 2017 Westminster terrorist attack, placing the Commons in lockdown. At the time there were very few measures in place to ensure the security of MPs and their families. After the attack Hoyle demanded that MPs be made more safe, and as speaker he will continue to fight to improve the safety of MPs and their families — this is one of his main pledges.

Hoyle has never revealed how he voted in the 2016 EU referendum, making him popular with a number of pro-Brexit MPs. His application to become speaker was supported by Charles Walker, deputy chairman of the Conservative 1922 backbench committee.

Hoyle has promised to restore the reputation of the Commons after allegations of bias and bullying under previous speaker John Bercow. He has reminded MPs that respect and tolerance must be shown. He has also pledged to encourage equality, stating that seniority and length of service should not be important and that new MPs are just as important to their constituents as more experienced ones.

What do the party leaders think?

Prime minister Boris Johnson said that he looked forward to welcoming an impartial speaker — a reference to accusations that Bercow tried to hamper government attempts to pass the Brexit bill. Johnson said that he hoped Hoyle would bring his 'signature kindness and reasonableness to our proceedings'. Jeremy Corbyn said that he was sure that Hoyle would be a brilliant speaker and would 'stand up to the executive'.

Will Hoyle be as powerful?

Hoyle has said that he will publish clerks' advice, which will make it more difficult for him to depart from conventions — something Bercow was accused of doing too often. This may suggest that he will not be as willing as Bercow to break with procedure in order to challenge the government. Leader of the House of

Commons, Jacob Rees-Mogg, has supported measures to review the speaker's ability to dictate Commons rules, as Bercow did by allowing MPs to control the parliamentary timetable, and how long an individual can serve in the post (Bercow served for over 10 years).

Facts about the new speaker

- After being elected Hoyle was dragged to the chair. This is part of a tradition that originated from the speaker's role of relaying the Commons' opinions to the monarch. Historically, speakers were reluctant to take the job because being the bearer of bad news could be fatal.
- Hoyle will only have 1 day in his new role as speaker before the general election on 12 December.
- Hoyle was knighted in the 2018 New Year's honours list for services to politics.
- His father Doug was the Labour MP for Warrington North until 1997 and he currently sits in the House of Lords.
- He has a pet parrot called Boris, named after the prime minister, that he has already trained to squawk 'order, order'. He also has a terrier named after speaker Betty Boothroyd, a Rottweiler named after Gordon Brown and a tortoise named after Margaret Thatcher, who has a 'hard shell and is not for turning'.

Questions for debate

- 1 Is AV the most democratic method of selecting the speaker?
- 2 Should the speaker have more or less power?

Weblinks

Watch Lindsay Hoyle get dragged to the chair:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=yarpXLsSuno

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