

# UK: New parent MPs will be allowed to employ a stand-in to take part in Commons votes under plans to give members six months parental leave <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

- **Male and female MPs to be entitled to six months paid parental leave**
- **During this period, they can appoint a proxy to take part in Commons votes**
- **A parliamentary committee is expected to recommend the proposal this week**
- **Plans was put forward by former Labour deputy leader Harriet Harman**

Calls for MPs to be allowed to employ a stand-in after having a baby won ministerial backing yesterday.

Margot James, who has the small business portfolio, said it was vital for new parents to have time off.

Under a plan backed by Commons Speaker John Bercow, both male and female MPs will be entitled to six months paid parental leave during which they will be able to appoint a proxy to take part in Commons votes.

A parliamentary committee is expected to recommend the proposal this week. It was put forward by former Labour deputy leader Harriet Harman.

Miss James said in a letter to the Times: 'In the first few months of a baby's life, parents - especially mothers - need time out of the workplace to bond with their newborn and recover from any complications in childbirth.

'Harriet Harman is right to argue that outdated Commons rules need to be overhauled. MPs who are parents do not deserve greater maternity and paternity entitlements than their constituents but neither should they be placed at a disadvantage.

'Childcare is not a "woman's issue" but women still assume a greater share of these responsibilities. Hence provision for parental leave is more important to women who aspire to become an MP than it is to men of a similar age.

'We must remove all barriers to women entering parliament if we are to build a more inclusive culture.'

The Commons reference group on representation and inclusion is looking to adopt the plan as part of new cross-party arrangements for maternity, paternity, parental, adoption and caring leave. MPs are not considered employees and are therefore not given formal parental leave, and cannot vote if they choose to stay at home.

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, which oversees MPs' pay, has said it is 'supportive in principle' of the proposal for six months of paid leave.

Last year a report into women in Parliament by Professor Sarah Childs suggested MPs with new babies should be able to vote from home, or nominate a proxy voter who could also table questions and amendments in Parliament.

The Commons has already adopted measures to become more family friendly in recent years, including limiting late night sittings and introducing an on-site nursery.

In 2014, Duncan Hames became the first MP to carry a baby through the voting lobby of the House of Commons after a rule change. The Liberal Democrat, wmarried to former minister Jo Swinson, was looking after their six-month-old son Andrew when the division bell rang. Mr Hames took his son into the chamber to vote on the timetable motion for the small business bill.

Since the June election, the absence of a Conservative majority has led to MPs being called into Westminster from maternity leave or their

hospital beds for knife-edge votes.

Since 2010, 17 babies have been born to 12 female MPs.

MPs already face questions about how much time they spend away from Westminster. The Commons sat for just 142 days in the 2016-17 session.

Traditionally, paternity leave has been a cause for concern among small businesses, which have fewer employees to cover extended absences.

The Federation of Small Businesses has warned small firms find it difficult to replace skilled workers and struggle with statutory paternity pay.

-reprinted from Daily Mail

**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** maternity and parental leave <sup>[4]</sup>

mother's labour force participation <sup>[5]</sup>

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