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Strengthen Parliament to Curb Over-mighty Government, says Strathclyde. Public Backs Lords check on Executive

As the country prepares for the General Election, one fundamental matter will determine how we are governed: the role of parliament. Will it remain independent or become a mere rubber stamp for the Government? Politeia's next pamphlet, *Working in Harness: parliamentary government and the role of the Lords*, explains that parliament's powers to hold the Executive to account are being stripped away as powers are given to unelected bodies (at home and overseas) and measures are rushed through parliament without proper scrutiny and debate. The author, Thomas Strathclyde, warns that the powers of both houses have been fatally weakened. The House of Commons no longer functions as an independent Chamber, while the House of Lords's traditional role in scrutinising measures is being curbed.

What can be done?

Lord Strathclyde, the Opposition Leader in the Lords, proposes that the powers of the Commons should be increased and those of the Lords vigorously defended against further encroachment by the Government. The independence of the second chamber must be secured (with a largely elected house) and reform must be the result of consensus. The Prime Minister should honour his formal pledge to parliament to introduce the second stage of reform and desist from packing the Lords with placemen. Its role must be secured so that it can help the Commons to scrutinise legislation and if necessary ask the Government to 'think again'.

The prime minister would do well to listen to the voters. An opinion poll* commissioned by Politeia to coincide with the publication of this pamphlet, shows:

- 72 per cent of people believe the House of Lords does a good job
- 65 per cent think the House of Lords has done a good job at making the Government think again
- 71 per cent think the House of Lords provides an effective check on the power of Government
- 72 per cent think that the House of Commons has too much power and needs to have its decisions checked by a second body
- just under two-thirds do not want the powers of the House of Lords to be reduced
- 6 in 10 people believe that reform of the House of Lords is not a priority over the next five years.

*ICM interviewed a random sample of 1005 adults aged 18+ by telephone between March 18th and 20th 2005. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full findings can be found on www.politeia.co.uk.

Working in Harness: parliamentary government and the role of the Lords will be published by Politeia on Monday 4th April, and is available from Politeia, 22 Charing Cross Road, WC2H 0QP at £3.00. **The text will be available by e mail in advance to journalists on application by response to this message.** Enquiries to Lord Strathclyde on 0207 219 3236 or to Politeia on 0207 240 5070, e-mail, info@politeia.co.uk

