

MP calls for clock-in cards to prove peers are putting in 'full shift'

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Peers and MPs should use security cards to tap in and out of parliament so the public can see how much time they are spending in Westminster, a senior MP has proposed.

Tommy Sheppard, SNP spokesman in the Commons, has written to the Speakers of both houses and the head of security in the Palace of Westminster asking them to consider his proposal. He suggests it would not only help transparency, but would also aid the authorities in emergency situations.

The proposal follows claims that a small number of peers have abused a system that allows them [to claim £300 a day](#) once they have signed in to the House of Lords. MPs are paid a salary of £74,000 a year.

Lord Fowler, the Speaker in the Lords, announced last week that the current pass system would be replaced in the autumn.

Most parliamentarians and staff use their security passes and a personalised code to enter the parliamentary estate through security gates. As they exit, however, they can walk through gates without the use of their security pass.

Sheppard said using Oyster-style cards would mean the public could monitor how long MPs and peers have been at work and whether they were value for money.

Such a system would also be cost-effective and offer the benefit of allowing the authorities to know how many people are in the building in the event of a terrorist attack or a fire, the MP for Edinburgh East said.

“There are legitimate concerns about the costs of the [House of Lords](#). Some are concerned they are claiming £300 for a day’s work and not putting in a full shift. I want to prove that wrong by enhancing the security system so it records how long they spend in parliament.”

Members of the Lords are not asked to use their pass codes if they enter the parliamentary estate through the peers’ entrance. At present, there is no way of recording whether peers, MPs or staff have left the estate from one of more than eight exits.

In March, the former Lord Speaker Lady D’Souza claimed she saw one peer [keep a cab running](#) as he rushed in and out of the Lords to claim his daily allowance.

Speaking to a BBC documentary, the senior crossbencher said: “I can remember one occasion when I was leaving the house quite late and there was a peer – who shall be utterly nameless – who jumped out of a taxi just outside the peers’ entrance, left the engine running.

“He ran in, presumably to show that he’d attended, and then ran out again while the taxi was still running.”

In his letters to the Speaker of the Commons, John Bercow, Fowler and Eric Hepburn, the director of security for parliament, Sheppard wrote: “I believe the security system should require passholders to swipe their pass on exit as well as upon entry. In essence this would allow passes to operate in a similar way to the London underground Oyster card, with holders swiping in and out.”

Citing the possibility of a terrorist incident or a fire, he added: “This information would greatly assist in dealing with any emergencies which might arise.”

Fowler has responded to Sheppard's suggestion, writing that it would have no obvious security benefit because there were many members of the public who access the estate without official passes.

"I do not see the advantage of altering the current practice which to date does not monitor whether MPs or peers are on the estate. I am sure you recognise this would be an imperfect measure of whether they are undertaking parliamentary activity," he said.

A spokesman for Bercow said: "Mr Speaker will respond to the letter in due course."

A spokesman for Hepburn said he would not comment on private correspondence.