The Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (FDSD) is a charity that explores the links between democracy and sustainable development, using evidence, advocacy and dialogue so that society can thrive today and in the future. We have a particular interest in how political systems can better incorporate long-term thinking and take into account the interests of future generations.

We propose the creation of a House of Lords Committee for Future Generations that would be able to conduct reviews and scrutinise upcoming legislation to assess long-term impacts and consider the interests of future generations. Full details of the proposal are provided in paragraphs 10 to 19.

The problem of ‘short-termism’ in politics, and its implications, are well known – for example, in relation to rapid technological development, inter-generational economic opportunity, welfare and social care provision and environmental challenges. Additionally, such issues tend to be dealt with individually, reinforcing a siloed approach to the policy process.

The role and composition of the House of Lords means that it is well placed to think long term, and consider the interests of future generations. The proposed Committee for Future Generations would generate a strategic capacity for such thinking and related activities within Parliament. It would take advantage of the expertise present in the House of Lords, supplementing existing scrutiny and review activities in both Houses of Parliament. No single body in either House has this particular set of critical responsibilities.

In early March 2018, we sent the proposal to peers for whom we had contact details, and held a number of conversations. With only a few exceptions, the peers that responded were in favour of our approach. The following 33 peers formally endorsed the proposal for a Committee for Future Generations:

- The Rt Hon the Lord Adonis
- The Lord Berkeley OBE
- The Baroness Berridge
- The Lord Bishop of Norwich
- The Baroness Brown of Cambridge DBE
- The Lord Crisp KCB
- The Lord Dubs
- The Baroness Eaton DBE DL
6. We also have informal support from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Future Generations.

7. We believe that this proposal for a Committee for Future Generations responds to three of the main questions driving the Liaison Committee’s review of investigative and scrutiny committees, namely:

7.1 How can Committees add more value to the scrutiny work of the House of Lords as a second chamber? A Committee for Future Generations would bring strategic capacity and a systematic perspective on the long-term implications of policy into scrutiny and review procedures;

7.2 How can House of Lords Committees develop a national conversation to complement their inquiry and scrutiny work? A Committee for Future Generations would be well placed to lead a public conversation, using different approaches to engagement on the long-term challenges and opportunities facing the UK post-Brexit;

7.3 How can House of Lords Committees maximise their impact inside and outside the House? A Committee for Future Generations would improve
Parliament’s capacity to consider systematically the long term, not only through ongoing scrutiny and reviews, but also potentially through the regular publication (perhaps annually) of future trends across a range of policy areas. The Committee would be well placed to work with other future generations institutions around the world to share good practice and promote consideration of future generations internationally.

8. The proposal for a House of Lords Committee for Future Generations responds to other specific questions in the review document, namely:

8.1 *Should the current committee structure be changed?* We believe a Committee for Future Generations would be a substantial addition to the committee structure, strengthening the role of the House of Lords in taking a long-term view, in a way that supplements existing scrutiny and review functions across both Houses of Parliament.

8.2 *What changes are needed in the wake of Brexit?* Brexit will naturally take up a lot of parliamentary time in both the House of Lords and House of Commons. A Committee for Future Generations in the House of Lords could be an ideal space in which to consider the UK’s long-term opportunities and challenges, and engage the public in national conversations on these themes.

8.3 *How can Lords committees engage more effectively with the public and media to encourage a national conversation?* Other institutions established around the world to promote the interests of future generations have succeeded in engaging the public in many different ways, both offline and online. Evidence from Wales – both in the development of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the more recent activities of the Future Generations Commissioner – show that there is appetite for public engagement in this area.

9 We would be delighted to provide further evidence to the Liaison Committee to support the review process.

**The Proposal for a Committee on Future Generations**

10 A frequent criticism of the political process in the UK and around the world is that it is too preoccupied with short-term considerations. There will always be short-term pressures from, for example, the electorate and markets. These are an important part of a functioning democracy. But many of the most important challenges of our time are long-term. These challenges include the implications of new and emerging technologies, pensions and social care provision, infrastructure, inter-generational standards of living and employment opportunities, as well as environmental concerns.
11 The House of Lords Liaison Committee is reviewing the structure and function of committees. **We propose that the House of Lords creates a Committee for Future Generations, to bring ‘long-term thinking’ more systematically into the workings of Parliament.**

12 The House of Lords has always provided a partial counter-balance to the excessive focus on the short-term, because it is relatively insulated from electoral cycles and can take a longer-term perspective. The continuity that it represents stretches back into the nation’s past but also forwards into the future and a concern for the generations to come.

13 We believe that this ability to consider the long term could be strengthened through a Committee for Future Generations that is charged with reviewing future challenges, as well as scrutinising existing and proposed legislation for its long-term impact.

14 The problem of ‘short-termism’ in politics was explored in detail by the international Oxford Martin Commission for Future Generations in its 2013 report, *Now for the Long Term*. The Commission recommended investing in “innovative institutions… independent of the short-term pressures facing governments of the day but appropriately accountable to the political system in question.” Such institutions “should be charged with conducting systematic reviews and analysis of longer-term issues.”

15 There are several examples of political institutions and arrangements that address the long term (see www.fdsd.org/ways-forward/political-institutions-and-policy-making/ for further details). The one that is most like our proposal is the Committee for the Future that forms part of the Finnish Parliament. Other countries have established Commissioners or Ombudsmen for Future Generations. Hungary has the longest established ombudsman; Wales has the most recent one, established under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Within Whitehall, the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit used to play a role in long-term thinking, while the Government Office for Science’s Foresight Projects has a horizon-scanning and future planning function. There are also examples of long-term planning in the private sector, including the well-known scenario approach by Shell. Organisations such as McKinsey and the Economist Intelligence Unit are much in demand for the advice and insight they can provide on long-term trends. Experience from these various institutions would inform the workings of the House of Lords Committee for Future Generations.

16 We envisage three functions for the Committee:

16.1 The Committee should be able to select, from current and draft legislation, bills that it would scrutinise with a long-term perspective, considering the impact on future generations, and then suggest amendments
to protect future generations’ interests. These amendments would then be considered by the House at Committee Stage;

16.2 The Committee should also conduct its own reviews, in the manner of a select committee inquiry. It should focus on topics that it believes are not being properly addressed elsewhere in Parliament. Again, it would provide a long-term perspective and consider the interests of future generations;

16.3 The Committee should produce an annual report on long-term trends, with recommendations for how Parliament and Government should respond, in terms of both policies and processes for investigation, assessment and decision making. This report would be debated in both Houses of Parliament.

17 In undertaking these functions, the Committee for Future Generations would be well placed to instigate much needed public engagement and national conversations on critical issues with long-term impacts that are fundamental to creating a post-Brexit vision for the UK.

18 Composition: The Committee’s membership should be determined in the same way as any other committee of the House. As well as political balance, the Committee should also include a balance of expertise.

19 Timings: We propose that the Liaison Committee incorporate the Committee for Future Generations into forthcoming recommendations for revising the House of Lords committee structures.

10 April 2018