

PRACTICAL PARLIAMENTARY HANDBOOK

Role of Assembly Committees

A practical guide for Members of the Provincial Assembly

Purpose: To explain how Assembly committees support legislation, executive oversight, financial accountability, institutional discipline, and informed decision-making in the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab.

Provincial Assembly of the Punjab
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Introduction

An Assembly deals with legislation, public expenditure, government policies, public concerns, and the performance of provincial departments. The full House cannot examine every subject in sufficient detail during its regular sittings. Assembly committees therefore undertake detailed examination on behalf of the House.

A committee consists of a smaller group of Assembly members assigned to examine a particular department, Bill, financial matter, public issue, or parliamentary question. It studies the matter, receives information, discusses the evidence, and submits its findings and recommendations to the Assembly.

The committee system of the Punjab Assembly is mainly governed by Chapter XVII of the Rules of Procedure of the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, 1997. The relevant provisions extend from Rule 148 to Rule 188.^{[2][3][4]}

1. What Is an Assembly Committee?

An Assembly committee is a group of Members of the Provincial Assembly formed under the Rules of Procedure or through a decision of the Assembly or the Speaker.

A committee may be established for the entire tenure of the Assembly or for a particular task. It performs detailed work that would be difficult for the full House to undertake during normal proceedings.

Committees do not replace the Assembly. They assist the Assembly by examining matters closely and presenting informed recommendations. A committee normally acts only within the mandate given to it by the Rules, the Speaker, or the House.

2. Why Are Committees Necessary?

Committees make parliamentary work more focused and manageable. They allow members to examine documents, question departmental representatives, discuss technical matters, and consider different views in greater depth.

The main reasons for maintaining an effective committee system are:

1. To examine Bills before final consideration by the Assembly.
2. To oversee the work of provincial departments.
3. To review public expenditure and audit findings.
4. To investigate matters of public importance.
5. To follow up on promises made by ministers in the House.
6. To protect the privileges and dignity of the Assembly and its members.
7. To consider reforms in laws, rules, and parliamentary procedures.
8. To help the Assembly reach decisions based on evidence and detailed analysis.

Committees also provide a setting where members from the government and opposition can discuss issues with less political confrontation than often occurs during debates in the full House.

3. Constitutional and Procedural Basis

The Constitution establishes the political accountability of the Provincial Government to the Provincial Assembly. The Provincial Cabinet is collectively responsible to the Assembly, while audit reports relating to provincial accounts are placed before the provincial legislature under the constitutional financial accountability framework.^[1]

The detailed composition, authority, procedure, and functions of Punjab Assembly committees are set out in the Rules of Procedure of the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, 1997.

The Rules provide for:

- Departmental Standing Committees.
- Public Accounts Committees.
- The Committee on Government Assurances.
- The Committee on Privileges.

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- The House and Library Committee.
 - Committees dealing with ethics, parliamentary business, law reform, and delegated legislation.
 - Select Committees.
 - Special Committees.
 - Sub-committees formed for specified assignments.

4. The Committee System of the Punjab Assembly

The official Punjab Assembly committee system identifies **51 Standing Committees**, comprising:

- 42 Departmental Standing Committees.
- 9 other Standing Committees.^[3]

The Assembly's current online records for the present tenure list the following nine other committees:

1. Public Accounts Committee I.
2. Public Accounts Committee II.
3. Public Accounts Committee III.
4. Committee on Government Assurances.
5. Committee on Privileges.
6. Committee on Law Reforms and Delegated Legislation.
7. House and Library Committee.
8. Business Advisory and Ethics Committee.
9. Committee on Ethics.^[5]

The Assembly may also establish Special Committees to examine particular matters that do not fall fully within the mandate of an existing Standing Committee.

5. Departmental Standing Committees

A Departmental Standing Committee is linked to a particular provincial government department or policy area. Examples include agriculture, education, health, local government, finance, food, transport, law, and communications and works.

Its principal responsibility is to examine matters relating to the department assigned to it.

Main functions

A Departmental Standing Committee may:

- Examine a Bill referred to it.
- Review a subject or matter referred by the Assembly or the Speaker.
- Assess the performance of the relevant department.
- Examine departmental policies, programmes, administration, and implementation.
- Identify weaknesses in existing laws or administrative arrangements.
- Recommend legislative, policy, or administrative improvements.
- Review information supplied by the department.
- Submit a report to the Assembly.

Under Rule 154, a committee examines a Bill, subject, or matter referred to it by the Assembly or the Speaker and submits its recommendations. In the case of a Bill, the committee may recommend amendments within the scope of the Bill, but it cannot permanently prevent the Bill from being considered by the Assembly.^{[2][4]}

6. Legislative Scrutiny

One of the most important roles of an Assembly committee is the detailed examination of proposed legislation.

When a Bill is referred to a committee, members should consider:

1. The purpose of the Bill.
2. The problem the Bill is intended to solve.
3. Whether the proposed law is consistent with the Constitution.
4. Whether its provisions are clear and enforceable.
5. Its likely financial and administrative effects.
6. Its effects on citizens, businesses, institutions, and local communities.
7. Whether safeguards, penalties, appeal mechanisms, and implementation responsibilities are adequate.
8. Whether amendments are required.

The committee may recommend changes and present them alongside the original provisions of the Bill. The Assembly retains the final authority to accept, reject, or modify the committee's recommendations.^[7]

7. Executive Oversight

Committees are an important means through which the legislature examines the work of the executive branch.

Through committee proceedings, members can assess:

- Whether government policies are being implemented properly.
- Whether public programmes are achieving their intended results.
- Whether departments are acting within the law.
- Whether approved budgets are being used for authorized purposes.
- Whether delays, mismanagement, duplication, or administrative failures exist.
- Whether citizens are receiving the services promised by the government.

Effective oversight is not limited to identifying mistakes. It should also identify their causes, recommend practical corrective measures, and follow up on implementation.

8. Public Accounts Committees

Public Accounts Committees are central to financial accountability. They examine the use of public funds after expenditure has taken place.

Their work is generally based on:

- Audit reports prepared by the Auditor-General.
- Appropriation Accounts.
- Finance Accounts.
- Audit objections and departmental explanations.
- Records concerning irregular, unauthorized, wasteful, or excessive expenditure.

Public Accounts Committees may question departmental officers, seek explanations for audit observations, determine responsibility, recommend recoveries or corrective action, and monitor compliance with earlier decisions.

The purpose of a Public Accounts Committee is not to prepare the provincial budget. Its role is to examine whether public money was spent lawfully, properly, efficiently, and for the purposes approved by the Assembly.^{[1][2][4]}

9. Committee on Government Assurances

Ministers sometimes give assurances, promises, or undertakings while answering questions or participating in debates on the floor of the Assembly.

The Committee on Government Assurances examines these commitments and checks whether they have been fulfilled.

Its work may include:

- Identifying an assurance given by a minister.
- Seeking an implementation report from the concerned department.
- Examining the reason for delay or non-compliance.
- Determining whether the assurance has been fully, partly, or inadequately implemented.
- Recommending further action.

This committee helps ensure that statements made by ministers in the House are treated as formal responsibilities rather than informal political promises.^[4]

10. Committee on Privileges

Members and the Assembly enjoy certain parliamentary privileges that allow them to perform their legislative duties without improper obstruction or intimidation.

The Committee on Privileges examines matters involving an alleged breach of privilege or contempt of the Assembly.

Such matters may include:

- Obstructing a member in the performance of parliamentary duties.
- Disobeying a lawful direction or summons of the Assembly or a committee.
- Providing false, misleading, or incomplete information.
- Improperly influencing or threatening a member.
- Disrespecting the authority or proceedings of the Assembly.
- Unauthorized disclosure of confidential committee material.

The committee examines the facts and reports its findings and recommendations to the House. The Assembly decides what action should finally be taken.

11. Committee on Law Reforms and Delegated Legislation

The Committee on Law Reforms and Delegated Legislation examines matters connected with improvement of the legal system and the rules, regulations, notifications, and other instruments made by the executive under authority granted by an Act.

Its role may include examining whether delegated legislation:

- Remains within the authority granted by the parent law.
- Is consistent with the Constitution and existing legislation.
- Imposes requirements not authorized by the Assembly.
- Uses legislative authority properly and reasonably.
- Requires amendment, repeal, consolidation, or clarification.

The Rules of Procedure include specific provisions for the composition and work of this committee.^{[2][4]}

12. House, Library, Business, and Ethics Committees

House and Library Committee

The House and Library Committee deals with matters concerning facilities, services, accommodation, and library support available to members. The official committee system provides for a committee of not more than thirteen members, with the Deputy Speaker serving as its Chairperson.^{[3][4]}

Business Advisory and Ethics Committee

This committee assists in organizing and managing Assembly business and may consider matters relating to the orderly, fair, and responsible conduct of parliamentary work.

Committee on Ethics

The Committee on Ethics deals with ethical standards expected from members. It supports integrity, responsible conduct, respect for parliamentary institutions, and public confidence in the Assembly.

These committees support the internal administration, discipline, working environment, and institutional standards of the House.

13. Special and Select Committees

Special Committee

A Special Committee is established to examine a particular issue, incident, policy problem, or matter of public importance. Its mandate, membership, powers, and reporting period are normally defined when it is constituted.

A Special Committee usually ends after completing its assignment and submitting its report.

Select Committee

A Select Committee is generally constituted to examine a particular Bill in detail. It may consider the Bill clause by clause and recommend amendments before the Bill returns to the House. The Punjab Assembly glossary distinguishes a Select Committee from a Standing Committee on the basis of its particular legislative assignment.^[6]

Sub-committee

A committee may, where permitted, form a smaller sub-committee to examine a defined part of the matter before it. A sub-committee reports back to its parent committee.

14. Composition and Leadership

The Rules require committees to be elected by the Assembly within ninety days after the election of the Leader of the House following a general election.^[4]

A Departmental Standing Committee generally consists of fifteen members, of whom at least two must be women. The relevant minister and parliamentary secretary may serve as ex-officio members under the applicable provisions of the Rules.^{[2][4]}

A committee requires effective leadership from its Chairperson. The Chairperson should:

- Approve a clear agenda.
- Ensure that meetings are held regularly.
- Give members a fair opportunity to participate.
- Keep discussion within the committee's mandate.
- Encourage evidence-based deliberation.
- Maintain order and political balance.
- Ensure that decisions are properly recorded.
- Oversee preparation and presentation of the committee report.
- Monitor follow-up on recommendations.

The Chairperson should act as the institutional head of the committee and not merely as a representative of a political party.

15. How a Committee Handles a Matter

Stage 1: Referral

A Bill, subject, audit report, privilege question, assurance, or other matter is referred to the committee by the Assembly, the Speaker, or under the Rules.

Stage 2: Preparation

The committee secretariat prepares the agenda, background material, relevant laws, departmental replies, and working papers.

Stage 3: Briefing and evidence

The concerned department, officials, experts, or other relevant persons may provide information and answer questions.

Stage 4: Examination

Members examine the facts, legal provisions, financial information, implementation record, and competing viewpoints.

Stage 5: Deliberation

The committee discusses the available options and attempts to reach a reasoned conclusion.

Stage 6: Recommendations

The committee agrees on findings, proposed amendments, corrective actions, or policy recommendations.

Stage 7: Report

A formal report is prepared and approved by the committee.

Stage 8: Presentation to the Assembly

The Chairperson or an authorized member presents the report to the House.

Stage 9: Decision and follow-up

The Assembly may consider the report. The relevant department may be required to respond to or implement the recommendations according to the applicable rules and decisions.

Committee evidence and information may be treated as confidential until formally reported or authorized for publication. Rule 162 specifically regulates the confidentiality of evidence and information provided to a committee.^{[2][4]}

16. Role of an Assembly Member in a Committee

Membership of a committee is a substantive parliamentary responsibility. A member should:

1. Attend meetings regularly and punctually.
2. Read the agenda and background documents before the meeting.
3. Understand the committee's mandate.

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4. Study the relevant law, policy, budget, and departmental record.
 5. Ask clear and relevant questions.
 6. Distinguish evidence from political allegations.
 7. Examine the interests of the entire province, not only one constituency.
 8. Respect confidentiality requirements.
 9. Declare any personal conflict of interest.
 10. Participate in drafting findings and recommendations.
 11. Record a dissenting view respectfully when agreement is not possible.
 12. Monitor government action after the report has been submitted.

A member should not use a committee meeting only for speeches, political publicity, personal disputes, or matters outside the committee's jurisdiction.

17. Questions Members Should Ask

When examining a department or programme, members should ask:

- What legal authority supports this action?
- What result was the programme expected to achieve?
- How much money was approved and how much was spent?
- Were procurement and recruitment rules followed?
- What measurable results were achieved?
- Why were targets delayed or missed?
- Who was responsible for implementation?
- What complaints were received from citizens?
- What corrective action has been taken?
- When will the remaining work be completed?
- How will the committee's recommendations be implemented and verified?

Good questions should seek facts, responsibility, results, and corrective action.

18. Committee Reports

A strong committee report should contain:

1. The committee's mandate.
 2. The names of participating members.
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3. The meetings and proceedings held.
 4. The documents and evidence examined.
 5. The main facts established.
 6. The committee's analysis.
 7. Clear findings.
 8. Specific and practical recommendations.
 9. Responsibility for implementation.
 10. A proposed implementation period.
 11. Any dissenting opinion, where applicable.
 12. A system for follow-up and compliance.

Recommendations such as “necessary action may be taken” are too vague. A useful recommendation identifies what must be done, who must do it, and when it should be completed.

19. Common Weaknesses in Committee Work

Committee effectiveness may be reduced by:

- Irregular meetings.
- Lack of quorum.
- Poor attendance.
- Late circulation of working papers.
- Inadequate research support.
- Excessive political confrontation.
- Questions unrelated to the agenda.
- Failure of departments to provide complete records.
- Weak or unclear recommendations.
- Delayed presentation of reports.
- Lack of follow-up after reports are submitted.
- Failure to track whether recommendations were implemented.

These weaknesses turn committees into discussion forums instead of effective accountability bodies.

20. Principles of an Effective Committee

Lawful

It must act within the Constitution, the Rules of Procedure, and its assigned mandate.

Prepared

Members should receive complete documents and sufficient time for study.

Evidence-based

Findings should be supported by records, testimony, audit material, and verifiable facts.

Fair

Government and opposition members should receive a proper opportunity to participate.

Focused

Discussion should remain connected to the agenda and the committee's jurisdiction.

Practical

Recommendations should be clear, realistic, and capable of implementation.

Transparent

Reports and authorized information should be made accessible unless confidentiality is legally required.

Accountable

The committee should monitor compliance with its recommendations.

21. Quick Checklist for Committee Members

Before the meeting

- Read the agenda.
- Review earlier minutes.
- Study the relevant documents.
- Prepare focused questions.
- Identify missing information.

During the meeting

- Remain within the agenda.
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- Ask for facts and records.
- Listen to other members.
- Avoid unnecessary speeches.
- Seek clear commitments and deadlines.

After the meeting

- Review the minutes.
- Confirm the agreed recommendations.
- Monitor departmental compliance.
- Prepare for the next stage of examination.
- Maintain confidentiality where required.

Conclusion

Assembly committees are the working arms of the legislature. They allow members to examine laws, government departments, public expenditure, ministerial assurances, ethical questions, and matters of public concern in greater depth.

Their effectiveness depends on regular meetings, informed participation, access to reliable information, balanced leadership, clear recommendations, and consistent follow-up.

A strong committee system strengthens the Assembly. A strong Assembly improves government accountability, the quality of legislation, the use of public money, and the representation of citizens.

Principal Sources

The handbook is based primarily on official Punjab Assembly material, the Constitution of Pakistan, and parliamentary training material issued by the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services. Web references were verified in July 2026.

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