A cross-party group of MPs has blocked a bill to exempt Parliament from the Freedom of Information Act.

In late April an alliance of Liberal Democrat, Conservative, Labour and nationalist MPs ‘talked out’ the bill by tabling some 20 amendments, which meant it ran out of time during its report stage. It is possible, although unlikely, that it may get further time for debate later in the session.

The bill was tabled by former Tory whip David Maclean, who is also a member of the House of Commons Commission, the governing body of Parliament. It would exempt MPs and peers from the FOI provisions along with MPs’ correspondence. Mr Maclean insists the legislation is needed to protect communications with constituents from unauthorised disclosure. The present Act does exempt MPs’ correspondence, subject to a public interest test.

Leading the opposition to the bill, Liberal Democrat Simon Hughes said, “it would be extremely bad politics and extremely bad law for us at this stage—when Parliament is hardly the most well regarded institution in the land—to seek to exempt the Commons and the Lords from the FOI Act.

“The public want to know what we are doing and in particular they want to know how we spend money on their behalf. It would be regarded as beyond acceptable if we said you can’t know some or all of the information about what we do,” he said.