

# **Chief Executive's Report to the SPCB March 2023**

## **Introduction**

This Report looks at activities across the organisation from the end of February to the end of March.

Items highlighted include:

- An overview of Committee and Chamber Office work
- An update from our Engagement and Communications Team
- Recent engagements undertaken by the International Relations Office

**David McGill**  
Clerk/Chief Executive

# **Overview of Parliamentary Activities**

## **Legislation and Parliamentary Business**

### **Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee**

#### **Chamber Documents**

A new edition (fully revised and updated) of the Guidance on Committees was published at the end of February. This is part of a wider project (under the banner of the Scrutiny Improvement Programme) to expand the set of Guidance volumes and make them more coherent and accessible and has been endorsed by the SPPA Committee. Further guidance volumes are in preparation.

#### **Parliamentary Business Team**

The team is taking forward planning for the First Minister selection process that will follow the conclusion of the SNP leadership contest.

#### **Chamber Desk**

Chamber Desk is taking forward work on the potential impacts in respect of oral questions scheduling of any changes to ministerial portfolios following appointment of the new First Minister.

### **Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee**

The Committee is writing out to all the party groups to provide a briefing paper on parliamentary privilege and ask the party groups to identify any areas in which the current protections have proved insufficient.

On 9 March, it took evidence from the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life on his annual report. In particular, it scrutinised the Commissioner's progress in dealing with a backlog of complaints and reducing the time taken for investigating complaints. It also pursued issues relating to Auditor General's Section 22 report on the 2021-22 audit of the Commissioner for Ethical Standards.

The Committee had an initial consideration of the Gender Sensitive Audit report and agreed to return to the individual recommendations at future meetings after the Easter recess.

The Committee considered a request from Stuart McMillan MSP for the proxy voting scheme to provide for members representing the Parliament at Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meetings to be able to exercise a proxy vote. The Committee agreed to hear from Stuart McMillan as part of its evaluation of the scheme.

#### **Non-Government Bills Unit (NGBU)**

The Non-government Bills Unit continues to experience high demand for its services.

## **Scrutiny**

### **Conveners Group**

The Conveners Group continues to take forward its strategic objectives, with good progress being made around Net Zero scrutiny, with several committees using Conveners Group work to inform their own approaches and work programme development. As part of its post EU-scrutiny strategic priority, the Group is also being kept updated on the potential impact to committee business from the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill (REUL) currently progressing through the UK Parliament. The Group will continue to keep this under review to ensure that the necessary support for committees is in place.

This month, the Conveners Group held an informative session with the Minister for Parliamentary Business, where it discussed issues around programming of parliamentary business, legislative consent memorandums, retained EU law and other matters relating to the operation of committees. The Group had hoped to follow this with a session with the First Minister on the 29 March, but due to the SNP leadership election, the Group will look to re-arrange this session before the summer recess.

### **Committees**

#### **Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee**

The Committee concluded evidence-taking on its inquiry into the future of Scotland's ferry services in late February, with evidence from Calmac, CMAL and the Scottish Government. It expects to report in May so as to contribute to the Scottish Government's new islands connectivity plan.

The Committee will be taking evidence on the deposit return scheme at meetings in March, hearing from the Scottish Government and Circularity Scotland. The aim of these evidence sessions is to better understand the key facts around the readiness of the scheme to go live in August.

The Committee has just launched a short inquiry into Scotland's electricity infrastructure and whether it is an enabler or inhibitor of Scotland's net zero energy ambitions.

#### **Health, Social Care and Sport Committee**

The Committee has been focused in recent months on its Stage 1 scrutiny of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. At the request of the Scottish Government, the deadline for completion of Stage 1 has now been delayed until 30 June. The Committee has completed a first review of its draft Stage 1 report and, in light of the new deadline, will next revisit the draft at its meeting on 9 May. By this point, there may be greater clarity regarding how a new First Minister wishes to proceed with the Bill in light of recent media comments

made by all the candidates for the role in relation to the National Care Service policy.

The Committee will shortly finish taking evidence on the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Bill and is due to consider a draft Stage 1 report immediately after the Easter recess.

Aside from this, other workstreams for the Committee include commencement of an inquiry into female participation in sport and physical activity and periodic scrutiny of NHS boards.

The Committee has also committed itself to undertaking an inquiry into access to rural and remote healthcare later this year, on the back of a number of petitions on this subject recently referred to it.

Finally, we are anticipating the introduction of another Scottish Government Bill – the Public Health (Restriction of Promotions) Bill. This was originally expected prior to Easter recess although the Committee has been advised that this timetable is now subject to a delay.

### **Education, Children and Young People Committee**

The Committee is currently managing a very busy and diverse workload, balancing legislative scrutiny with inquiry work and responsive evidence sessions.

At the end of February, the Committee continued its budget scrutiny, holding a session with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on the Scottish Budget for 2023-24. This specifically focused on teacher numbers and an earlier statement from the Cabinet Secretary to the Chamber that the Scottish Government planned to “withhold and recoup” monies from local authorities, should the agreed outputs on teacher numbers not be met.

The Committee continued taking formal evidence on Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP’s Member’s Bill – the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill. It also held informal sessions with disabled young people, parents/carers and practitioners involved in the Scottish Government’s Principles into Practice pilots. A visit to Buchanan High School in Coatbridge, also informed the Committee’s scrutiny. The final formal evidence session on the Bill, with the Member in Charge, took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March.

The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 13 December 2022. The Committee considered its approach towards the Bill and held an informal briefing session with the Director of the Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice to explore the range of current processes in place to support young people in conflict with the law.

The Committee will start taking evidence on the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and is currently exploring options for

engagement, including potentially visiting secure accommodation and speaking to young people with previous experience of being held in a YOI or secure accommodation. In doing so, the Committee clerks are liaising with the Criminal Justice Committee, which is a designated secondary Committee on this Bill.

Finally, the Committee is currently working to agree its Colleges Regionalisation Inquiry report, which is due to be published later this month. This will look at the impact of regionalisation on the college sector, 10 years on.

### **Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee**

Aside from the work of the ECYP Committee, the Clerk to the Committee is leading work on a Staff Reference Group, which is designed to trial innovative and new ideas to increase citizen participation across the Scottish Parliament.

The group comprises 13 Members who have volunteered from across different grades and teams across the Scottish Parliament, including security, Parliament Communications Office, Visitor Services, Official Report and Digital Services – bringing together a varied knowledge pool and encouraging buy-in for citizen participation across the Scottish Parliament.

The group has met twice so far, and it is already showing promise in terms of sharing ideas, cross-team working and highlighting initiatives planned in different parts of the Parliament. The initial focus will be on progressing the interim findings of the CPPPC inquiry into citizen participation.

Representatives from Participation and Communities Team and the CPPP Committee area also present and involved at the meetings, with PACT also acting as secretariat for the group.

This work is designed not only to advance citizen participation, but also to align with wider strategic policies and aims, such as the Scrutiny Improvement Programme and the Public Engagement Strategy.

### **Economy and Fair Work Committee**

The Committee has held several evidence sessions on its inquiry on a Just Transition for the Grangemouth area, including hearing a perspective from the community via evidence from a community councillor. The Committee will visit the industrial complex at Grangemouth later this month. This work ties in with the Conveners Group strategic priority of net zero scrutiny.

The Committee held a debate on its report on its Town Centre and Retail inquiry. The debate was well attended and provided Members with an opportunity to debate the position in their own areas.

### **Finance and Public Administration Committee**

The Committee is continuing to gather evidence in relation to its inquiry into Effective Scottish Government Decision-making, which aims to bring greater understanding and transparency around the current decision-making process, look at comparative approaches, and identify where improvements might be made. It's hearing informally from civil servants, as well as former Ministers and former civil servants, before starting to take formal evidence in April.

In the absence of a clear overarching framework and plans being published with the Scottish Budget 2023-24, as expected, the FPA Committee has recently launched an inquiry into the Scottish Government's public service reform programme. This inquiry is intended to create more understanding around the plans, and how public bodies are working towards them, with findings to inform the Committee's pre-budget 2024-25 scrutiny later this year. Longer-term, the Committee has agreed to revisit progress each year and examine the outcomes from the programme towards the end of the parliamentary session.

### **Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee**

The Committee is continuing to gather evidence in relation to its post-legislative scrutiny of Part 2 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. The Committee began its work with an online engagement event with third sector and community organisations as well as a visit to Paisley. The Committee is now taking evidence from a broad selection of national and community bodies involved in community planning. This will take up the majority of the Committee's time between now and Easter.

In February the Committee also concluded its work in relation to short-term lets and the rent cap although the Committee intends to return to both issues.

The Committee is also working with the Futures Forum on an event looking at the relationship between central and local government in Scotland. The Committee is keen to see progress being made toward a New Deal between local and national government and hopes that this event can contribute.

Finally, the Committee is also beginning work in relation to its next tracker report looking at how the recommendations it made in the first years of this session have been progressed.

### **Public Audit Committee**

Towards the end of February, the Committee took oral evidence from the Permanent Secretary, Scottish Government on the 2021/22 audit of the Scottish Government Consolidated Accounts. The session covered a wide range of areas including how replacement European Union structural funds will be audited in the future, the progress it has made in producing whole government accounts and how its business investment Framework is being used in practice. The Committee has agreed to seek further written information from the Permanent Secretary and will consider the response once it has been received.

The Committee has been considering its draft report in relation to its scrutiny of the Auditor General for Scotland's report on New vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides. The report will be published in due course.

The Committee recently took evidence from the Auditor General for Scotland on the 2021/22 audit of the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland following a highly critical report the previous year. While signs of progress have been made, particularly in relation to its governance arrangements, challenges remain, including addressing the significant complaints backlog. The Committee will take oral evidence from the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland at its meeting on 30 March.

## **SPICe**

The SPICe Data Visualisation Team published a detailed package of material on the 2022 data on Earnings in Scotland 2022, from the ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, including [a detailed briefing](#), and dedicated infographics on [the real living wage](#) and [the gender pay gap](#).

In addition, SPICe researchers continued to publish blog articles on hot topics to support parliamentary business, including on the [Northern Ireland Protocol](#), the [Deposit Return Scheme](#) and [Green Freeports](#).

The SPICe Enquiries and Collections Team is reviewing the content of the Scottish Parliament Annual Statistics (from the start of Session 6). This publicly available statistics volume provides parliamentary data broken down by type of business and by parliamentary year. The review will ensure that, as well as continuing to provide comprehensive and relevant data, the data is presented in an accessible and more dynamic way.

## **Parliamentary Services**

### **Engagement and Communications**

The annual **International Women's Day** event took place in the Debating Chamber and the Garden Lobby on Saturday 4 March in partnership with Scottish Women's Convention and on the day after the report of the Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit was published. Over 300 women joined the Presiding Officer, the First Minister and a cross-party panel of Members and other speakers to celebrate and discuss this year's conference theme, *Break the Bias*. The event also discussed the impact of legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament and the last 20 years of advocacy for equality by the Scottish Women's Convention, on the lives of women and girls in Scotland. Speakers also addressed why breaking the bias can help inform priorities for women and equality for the future.

### **Scottish Youth Parliament pop-up events**

During March the Participation and Communities Team co-delivered a series of regional pop-up events with the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP). Members of the SYP were brought together in Aberdeen, Galashiels, Bishopbriggs, Inverness, Dunfermline, Saltcoats and at an online session, to help them develop the skills and knowledge to carry out their role. This included helping them understand more about the role of MSPs and how they can work together on issues in their local area and discussing their latest campaign actions on the Right to Food. Outputs from the events will be shared with MSPs and Parliament staff when SYP host an exhibition and drop-in sessions in Parliament in May.

### **Young Women Lead**

As part of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's inquiry into female participation in sport and physical activity, members of the 2018/19 Young Women Lead (YWL) programme gave evidence at the Committee's meeting on Tuesday 14 March. Jenni Snell and Katie Heath spoke about the report they were involved in producing as part of the Young Women Lead Committee's inquiry into the relationship young women have with sport and physical activity. Between 2017-2021 the Scottish Parliament worked in partnership with YWCA Scotland: the Young Women's Movement to help address the under-representation of young women in politics. Across three intakes, diverse groups of young women from across Scotland were supported by Parliament staff and Deputy Presiding Officer Linda Fabiani to form a committee and carry out an inquiry into a topic of their choosing. The programme won the Championing Gender Equality Scottish Public Service Award in 2018 and created a network of young women with the skills and confidence to engage in the work of Parliament. Jenni has gone from participating in the programme to taking on the role of CEO at the Young Women's Movement.

## **International Relations**

The International Relations Office supported:

- The Presiding Officer at a meeting with the Consul General of Ireland
- Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP and Members at a BIPA Plenary in Belfast
- Members and officials at meetings with Committee Chairs of the People's Majlis (Parliament) of Maldives
- Officials at meetings with the Clerk of the Legislative Council and Clerk of the Parliaments of Western Australia
- Members and officials at meetings with Members of the Parliament of Sri Lanka
- Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP, Members and officials at a meeting with the Chief Minister and Members of the Bangsamoro Parliament
- Members at a meeting with Members of the Committee for Constitution and Justice, Democracy, Europe and Equality of the Saxon State Parliament

- The Presiding Officer and officials at meetings with Members of the Parliament of Catalonia
- The Presiding Officer at a meeting with the Ambassador of Iceland.