

# **Appearing before a Scottish Parliament committee – what you need to know**

A witness is a person invited to give evidence at a committee meeting and, because of their experience and knowledge of the subject being discussed, we recognise that witnesses play a vital role in the work of the committees and the Parliament. This document gives general information on appearing before a Scottish Parliament committee. However, if you have specific questions about the committee you will be attending or any concerns about what will be involved, please contact the clerks of that committee who will be pleased to help.

## **What is a committee witness?**

In the Parliament's Standing Orders appearing before a committee is called "giving evidence" and those who appear are referred to as witnesses, so correspondence that you receive about your appearance is likely to use these terms. If you have specific questions about the committee you will be attending, the clerk of that committee will be pleased to help.

## **Access**

Most committee meetings are held at the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh. However, from time to time committees do meet in other venues. The committee clerks will send specific information about other venues.

The Parliament can provide an interpreter or other forms of communication support service (for example, a lipspeaker or speech to text reporter) if you require these to enable you to give evidence to the committee. Induction loop and infra-red systems are also installed in the committee rooms in the Parliament for people who are hard of hearing. Please contact the clerk to discuss your requirements as soon as possible so that these services can be arranged.

## Getting to Holyrood

For information about getting to the Parliament building at Holyrood, please contact Visitor Services at the Parliament. You can contact them by telephone (0131 348 5200 or 0800 092 7600), by Textphone (0800 092 7100) or by email ([sp.bookings@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:sp.bookings@scottish.parliament.uk)).

There is no public parking at Holyrood, although a small number of parking spaces are reserved for disabled people, including disabled witnesses. You should contact the clerk of the committee as soon as possible if you need to book one of these parking spaces. The entrance to the Parliament is located on Horse Wynd opposite the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

## **On arrival**

On the day you are to give evidence, please report by the specified time to the public entrance of the Parliament building at Holyrood. Please do not wait in any queue to enter the building but go immediately to the public entrance and make yourself known to security staff.

On entry to the building all visitors and baggage are subject to screening procedures similar to those used at British airports. You will be asked to walk through a metal arch detector and your bags will also be subject to x-ray screening. You should avoid bringing bulky baggage with you. Having passed through security you will be directed to the committee witness reception point. The Visitor Services staff will issue you with a witness pass and will direct you to the designated waiting area where a member of the committee clerking team will meet you.

It is essential that you wait in the designated waiting area for committee clerking staff to collect you. You should not attempt to make your own way to the meeting room, even if you know where it is situated.

Clerking staff will then show you either directly to the committee room or to a committee anteroom where you will be able to view the committee proceedings on television while you wait to give evidence. If you have a preference as to whether you wait to give evidence in the committee room or in a committee anteroom, please contact the clerks. Clerking staff will endeavour to accommodate your request but this cannot be guaranteed.

Following your evidence session it may be possible to observe the rest of the committee meeting either from the public gallery or an anteroom. If you wish to observe the remainder of the meeting, please discuss this with the clerks as soon as possible.

If you do not wish to stay and observe the meeting, a member of clerking staff will escort you to the exit or another public area of the building. Clerking staff will collect your witness pass.

## **Attendance at the meeting**

Please note that the names and, where appropriate, full titles of all those giving evidence should be sent to the clerks as soon as possible. The clerks will arrange security passes for all those appearing before the committee.

If friends or colleagues wish to attend the meeting as observers, they should obtain their own tickets for the public gallery/seating from Visitor Services (contact details given above).

Tickets can be booked up to seven days in advance of the meeting.



## **Written evidence**

If you want to supply a written submission in support of your appearance at the committee this must be sent in advance of the meeting so that copies can be circulated to members. Written material will normally need to be with the clerk at least a week before the meeting, although some committees may have a longer deadline, and more time may be needed if your submission has to be transcribed or translated.

Committees prefer to receive submissions in electronic format so please email your submission.

## **Treatment of written evidence**

If you intend to submit written evidence, you should ensure that you read the policy on treatment of written

evidence by subject and mandatory committees. This can be found on the Parliament's website at [www.scottish.parliament.uk/committees](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/committees) or can be sent to you by the clerks.

Committees' normal practice is to publish relevant evidence on the website or in the hard copy of any committee report. If you wish to ask for your evidence to be treated as confidential, or for your evidence to be published anonymously, please contact the clerk before you submit your evidence.

The Parliament must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998. This affects what information about living people the Parliament and its committees can make public. When evidence is published, your signature and personal contact information will not be published. It may also be necessary to edit information which can identify another living person who has not specifically given their consent to have information about them made public.

Typically the Parliament will not publish defamatory statements or material.

Finally you should be aware that the Parliament is covered by the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. If the committee receives a request for information under the Act, it may be legally required to release the information to the person who has made the request – even where the committee has agreed to treat all or part of the information in confidence.

## **A typical committee room**

There are six committee rooms of different sizes.

Normally witnesses sit at one end of the table with the convener and clerk seated at the opposite end.

Members of some committees are seated on either side of the table, while other committees favour having members seated down one side.

Seats for members of the public are situated behind the witnesses' seats.

## **Public evidence sessions**

Most evidence sessions are held in public. The Parliament's official reporters will be present for public items of business and journalists are in attendance at some committee meetings.

If you feel it would be more appropriate that some or all of your evidence should be given in private, please contact the clerks as soon as possible to discuss this.

## **Opening statements**

You should check with the clerks as soon as possible whether an opening statement has been requested by the committee, or whether the committee would be happy for you to deliver an opening statement at your request.

Please note that committees generally prefer that witnesses do not use audio-visual aids.

## **Interpreting arrangements**

If you would prefer to give your evidence in a language other than English, this may be possible with advance notice and the agreement of the committee convener. To enable interpreting arrangements to be put in place, you must contact the clerk of the committee as soon as possible, ideally at least two weeks before the committee meeting.

## **Giving evidence**

Each committee has a convener who chairs the meeting and will call members and witnesses to speak. Proceedings are relatively informal and

members normally address each other by first names. You should direct your remarks to the Chair who should be addressed as “Convener”. All the members will have nameplates in front of them and can be referred to as “Mr/Ms Smith”, “Jane Smith” etc. MSPs who are not members of the committee may attend and participate with the convener’s agreement.

Each committee has at least two clerks. The clerks will sit next to the convener during the meeting and advise on procedure. You will also see one or two official reporters sitting at the table.

## **Official report**

The Parliament’s official reporters will produce a “substantially verbatim” report of what is said at the meeting.

While you are giving evidence a security officer may occasionally pass you an envelope from an official reporter containing a request for clarification of something you have said during the meeting – for example, the meaning of any abbreviations or technical terms used. Witnesses should pass their response to a security officer. You need not reply immediately to a note, but you are requested to ensure that you reply before you leave the room. If you would need such communication in an alternative format, please discuss arrangements with the clerks as soon as possible.

Around a week after the meeting you will be sent a copy of the published *Official Report* of the meeting. It will be accompanied by a letter that explains what is meant by “substantially verbatim” and what to do if you wish to suggest corrections.



## **Broadcasting and audio system**

There are television cameras in each of the committee rooms. These cameras record public committee proceedings which are then broadcast on the Parliament's internal television network. In addition, camera footage is made available to other broadcasters for the purposes of news and other programmes. All public committee proceedings can also be watched live on the internet.

The microphones are operated by broadcasting staff, so you do not need to touch the microphone console.

Induction loop and infra-red systems are also installed in the committee rooms in the Parliament for people who are hard of hearing. If you are a hearing aid user and wish to use the induction loop system, you should switch your hearing aid to the 'T' position when you enter the committee room. If you wish to use the infra-

red system, we can provide you with a headset to use in the committee room. You should let the committee clerk know in advance of your visit if you wish to use the infra-red system so that we can arrange to have a headset ready for you.

## Crèche

The Parliament has a crèche and committee witnesses may apply for a place in the crèche for the period when they are to give evidence, but places are subject to availability. The crèche is free to the public and provides care for children aged six weeks to five years. It is open from 08.00 to 18.00, Monday to Friday, and can be used for up to four hours at a time. While a drop-in service is available, you are advised to book a place well in advance by emailing [creche@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:creche@scottish.parliament.uk) or calling 0131 348 6192. Further information on the crèche can be found on the Parliament's website.

## **Fire evacuation and other security issues**

**Fire evacuation:** If you hear a fire evacuation message, follow the instructions of committee clerking staff or Parliament security personnel. Staff will direct you to the nearest safe fire exit.

**Fire alert:** A fire alert message will signify that there is no need to evacuate a particular area immediately, but that all occupants should stay where they are until further instructions are issued but prepare themselves for evacuation. Once again, you should follow the instructions of committee clerking staff or Parliament security personnel.

If you think you may have difficulty in leaving the building without assistance during an evacuation, you should contact the clerks so that they can prepare a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) with you.

## **After the meeting**

If you have been requested to provide follow-up information, the clerk will normally write to you to confirm this request.

Witnesses are sent an evaluation form to assess the arrangements for the evidence session. These are most helpful to the clerks who welcome feedback, good or bad, on your experience of giving evidence. If you wish to contact the clerks to seek information on the committee's next steps in relation to your evidence session they will be pleased to help.

Not every evidence session will lead to a formal committee report. If a report is published, this may be some weeks or months after your evidence session.

## **Witness expenses**

In some situations the Parliament may pay expenses to witnesses arising out of their attendance at a committee meeting. This is, however, a matter entirely at the discretion of the committee. If you think that you might want to claim expenses, you should contact the clerk in advance of the meetings, as some claims such as air travel require prior approval. Where the claim is for travelling expenses, the Parliament will usually only pay for standard class travel by the most economic means of transport. Claims must be accompanied by the relevant receipts.

## **Public Information**

Public Information can help you find out about the business, membership and procedures of the Scottish Parliament.

To find out more about the work of committees in the Scottish Parliament, read our leaflet on what committees do or visit the committee web pages at [www.scottish.parliament.uk/committees](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/committees)

Please contact Public Information if you would like this information in another format or language.

**Address**      Public Information  
                    The Scottish Parliament  
                    Edinburgh  
                    EH99 1SP

**Telephone**    0800 092 7500 or 0131 348 5000

**Fòn** 0131 348 5395 (Gàidhlig)

Textphone users can contact us on 0800 092 7100.  
We also welcome calls using the Text Relay service.

**Text** 07786 209888

**Email** [sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk)

**Website** [www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)

**Twitter:** [@ScotParl](https://twitter.com/ScotParl)

**Facebook:** [/scottishparliament](https://www.facebook.com/scottishparliament)

**YouTube:** [/scottishparl](https://www.youtube.com/scottishparl)

The Scottish Parliament welcomes written  
correspondence in any language.

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