



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister
Scottish Government

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Dear First Minister

Parliamentary Liaison Officers

As you know, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee has been examining the role of Parliamentary Liaison Officers (PLOs) and the associated provisions in the Ministerial Code. As part of that process, on 22 September we heard evidence from Joe FitzPatrick MSP, Minister for Parliamentary Business. Following that meeting, the Committee has discussed what, if any, additional measures might be required in order to enhance transparency when PLOs participate in Parliamentary business.

The Committee recognises that in response to concerns raised about the role of PLOs in scrutinising Scottish Ministers, the Ministerial Code was updated in September 2016 to include revised provisions on PLOs. We welcome these changes, including the presumption that PLOs should not serve on a committee with a substantial direct link to their Cabinet Secretary's portfolio.

We note also that in respect of the requirement to declare appointment as a PLO, the Ministerial Code now states—

“4.14 At the beginning of each Parliamentary session, or when changes to PLO appointments are made, the Minister for Parliamentary Business will advise Parliament which MSPs have been appointed as PLOs. The Minister for Parliamentary Business will also ensure that PLO appointments are brought to the attention of Committee Conveners. PLOs should ensure that they declare their appointment as a PLO on the first occasion they are participating in Parliamentary business related to the portfolio of their Cabinet Secretary.”

In order to further enhance the transparency of PLO participation in Parliamentary business, the Committee has considered two options: a further revision to the Ministerial Code; or a new rule inserted into the Code of Conduct for MSPs.

The Committee's preference is for the Ministerial Code to be revised to extend the requirement on PLOs to declare their status. We consider that the final sentence of paragraph 4.14 could be replaced with the following alternative—

PLOs must declare their status as a PLO on each occasion they are participating in Parliamentary business related to the portfolio of their Cabinet Secretary.

The Committee hopes that that you will be willing to consider this change. I look forward to receiving your response.

I am copying this letter to the Minister for Parliamentary Business and the Presiding Officer for their information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Clare Adamson".

Clare Adamson MSP
Convener
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee