

Inquiry into the Reform of Parliamentary Business

Issue

A letter from the Convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointment (SPPA) Committee is attached at Annex B which seeks SPCB comments on the committee's inquiry into parliamentary reform. A draft reply is also attached as Annex A for which SPCB endorsement is sought. The letter is linked strategically to the support for parliamentary business.

Ken Hughes, extension 85203, is the contact.

Discussion

The SPPA inquiry was initiated by the Presiding Officer who invited the committee to examine how the parliamentary week could be structured to best effect. The committee's consultation is based on a proposal that committees meet in the mornings of Tuesday to Thursday and that the chamber meets on the same afternoons. It is not envisaged at this point that there will be an overall increase in sitting times.

The draft reply therefore makes the assumption that both the amount and length of business will be similar to that of previous years. This will of course include later sittings for Bill Stage 3 proceedings when the occasion demands.

The SPCB has been given the assurance by the Convener that he will seek further comments should different or more detailed conclusions emerge from the committee's inquiry.

Resource Implications

The thrust of the draft response is to confirm that there will be little or no resource implications arising from the current proposals to change sitting times.

Publication Scheme

It is recommended that this paper and attachments can be published.

Decision

The SPCB is invited to agree the draft reply attached.

Committees and Outreach Group
October 2011

Proposed response from the SPCB

Thank you for your letter of 15 September regarding your committee's inquiry into the reform of parliamentary business. I am replying in my capacity as Chair of the SPCB.

As you know, the Corporate Body is responsible for providing the property, staff and services required for the parliament's purposes. It therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment on the potential resource implications of supporting a different sitting pattern.

This response addresses specifically the option that the Chamber meets on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons with committees in the morning. It is assumed that the overall sitting times would not increase significantly but later sittings to accommodate Stage 3 bill proceedings would be scheduled as was the case towards the end of session 3.

Having analysed all of our parliamentary business support services which range from clerks, researchers, broadcasting and the Official Report to security, media office and BIT, we can confirm that any change within the scope proposed could be supported from within existing staff resources. The overall effect would be cost neutral.

Please let me know if the SPCB could be of further assistance. We would be particularly interested in providing additional input if your committee proposed any significant change to the length of sitting times.



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

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15 September 2011

Dear Presiding Officer

I am writing to you in your capacity as chair of the SPCB.

As you will be aware, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee has begun an inquiry into the reform of parliamentary business. The Committee has issued a call for views on this inquiry, which I attach with this letter for information.

The Committee is conducting its inquiry in two phases. The remit of phase one, which the Committee plans to complete by Christmas, is—

To consider how the Parliamentary week can best be organised to allow the Parliament to be effective in its key roles of legislation, scrutiny and debate; and specifically:

- *the potential benefits of changing Chamber and committee sitting patterns;*
- *the potential benefits of changing the format and regularity of question times;*
- *how to make best use of Chamber time; and*
- *the potential to introduce new forms of business into the Chamber.*

I believe it is important that all bodies within the Parliament have an opportunity to contribute to the debate on parliamentary reform and play a full role in the Committee's inquiry.

I should be grateful if the SPCB could give specific consideration to the potential financial and practical implications of the suggestion to change sitting patterns so that the Chamber meets on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons with committees in the morning. I would also be very grateful if the SPCB could consider how quickly this change could be implemented if the Committee were to support it. The SPCB is of course very welcome to comment on the implications of any other options that have been mooted in relation to parliamentary reform – for example the proposal to allow the Chamber to meet at the same time as committees. The Committee would of course also welcome the views of the SPCB on any other matters within the remit.

I would be grateful for a response on these points by 19 October 2011, in order to allow the Committee to take into account the views of the SPCB as its inquiry develops.

Finally, it is likely that as Phase 1 of the inquiry progresses, the Committee will develop its thinking in relation to parliamentary reform, and may wish to discuss its emerging conclusions with other bodies in Parliament in advance of reporting formally. I therefore intend to keep the SPCB informed of the progress of the Committee's inquiry and I will undertake to consult with SPCB members as appropriate during this process.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dave Thompson', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Dave Thompson MSP
Convener
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee