

Chief Executive's Report to the SPCB January 2024

Introduction

This Report looks at activities across the organisation from November 2023 to January 2024.

Items highlighted include:

- First Information Notice served under the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016
- An overview of recent work undertaken by the Chamber and Committee office
- An update from Facilities Management

David McGill

Clerk/Chief Executive

Overview of Parliamentary Activities

The Lobbying Register

The SPCB might be interested to note that on 17 January 2024, I served the first Information Notice under section 17 of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016.

This Notice informed the receiver of its responsibility to comply with information required in respect of the lobbying register and to submit material by 16 February.

The information sought related to several instances of a failure to respond to, and action, updates and clarifications to information returns that were sought by the Lobbying Register Team, covering a period since May 2019.

Failure to comply with the Information Notice can result in a fine of up to £1,000. The receiver of the notice does have the right of appeal to a Sheriff.

Legislation and Parliamentary Business

Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

In December, the SPPA Committee published its report on the evaluation of the proxy voting pilot. The Committee recommended that a proxy voting system be introduced on a permanent basis and set out Standing Orders rule changes to make this permanent provision. The Parliament agreed to these changes on 21 December and the changes took effect from 22 December. A Presiding Officer scheme setting out the detailed requirements for operation of the proxy vote system was also published on 22 December.

The Standing Order rule changes and Presiding Officer scheme largely reflect the terms of the pilot but have included the eligibility criteria within Standing Orders rather than being part of the scheme and have introduced greater flexibility on when applications for a proxy vote can be made. Members can now apply for a proxy vote on each day when there is a meeting of the Parliament, rather than only on a Tuesday as was the case under the pilot. These changes also give effect to recommendation 22 of the *A Parliament for all* report.

Business Team

As Members were unable to sign the Register at the beginning of the session due to Covid-19 health restrictions, the Business Team made arrangements to allow Members to sign the register and be photographed doing so. The majority of Members took up the opportunity to be photographed signing the register and individual arrangements were made for the remaining Members. Only one Member is still to sign the register (this is due to illness).

Non-Government Bills Unit

Of the 24 members bills on the Parliament website, four have been introduced and two have fallen. Most of the remaining active bills are now making progress through the drafting stage. A number of bills in the drafting stage are preparing for introduction in the first half of 2024.

Broadcasting Office

In November, as part of our commitment to making Scottish Parliament coverage as accessible as possible, the office launched a service providing captions on the Chamber webcast feeds. We are working with external user groups for feedback.

We have met our staffing efficiency target earlier than planned, by establishing new workflows and restructuring team roles.

New consoles have been installed into all Chamber desks, ahead of testing and Member engagement in February and March.

Scrutiny

Conveners Group

The Conveners Group held its annual session with the Minister for Parliamentary Business in November 2023. These sessions provide Conveners with the opportunity to discuss parliamentary business as it relates to the work of committees and raise some of the strategic priorities that the Group has been pursuing.

It was a positive discussion and covered a range of subjects, including: the work programmes of committees and the pressures of the legislative programme; the timing of legislative consent memorandums; the delayed publication of the Climate Change Plan, scrutiny challenges of framework bills and engagement in post-legislative scrutiny.

Education, Children and Young People Committee

In November 2023, the Committee held an evidence session on Education Reform, hearing from school leaders and representative bodies, as well as from James Withers, author of the Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape. Both of these sessions will inform future scrutiny of the Minister for Further and Higher Education; and Minister for Veterans (on skills delivery) and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (on education reform and the 2024/25 budget).

Over the last two months, the Committee has also considered correspondence from two survivor groups regarding Scotland's redress scheme for survivors of childhood abuse in care. The Committee wrote to the Deputy First Minister, highlighting several issues of concern to the survivors. This included communication and transparency issues, e.g., the ability for survivors to understand exactly who is eligible for redress, the different stages of the redress scheme and how long each stage might take; as well as the ability for survivors to access documents (e.g., minutes) which provide reassurance as to how the scheme is being run.

The Committee has also sought views on Additional Support for Learning (ASL), in a call for views which closed on 31 December. The inquiry's focus is on the implementation of a presumption of mainstreaming, meaning that, where possible, children and young people with additional support needs should be educated in mainstream schools alongside other pupils, rather than in special schools; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on additional support for learning and the use of remedies as set out in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. The call for views was notable as it attracted the highest number of BSL responses to date to a Scottish Parliament consultation. The Committee will take forward the inquiry in the new year.

In late November, the Committee heard evidence on progress towards meeting the Promise, hearing from a wide range of stakeholders including the new Commissioner for Children and Young People, Who Cares? Scotland, Social Work Scotland, CELCIS, the Care Inspectorate and the Promise Scotland. The Committee also publicly committed to hearing directly from young people on this issue in 2024.

Planned Stage 2 proceedings on the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill in December were postponed at short notice to February 2024. In their place, the Committee held a session on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, hearing about the opportunities and challenges AI offered to pupils, students and staff, both now and in the future.

The Committee continues to have a busy legislative programme, with the Scottish Languages Bill being introduced on 29 November.

Finance and Public Administration Committee

To enhance transparency and better understanding the impact of the changes agreed by the UK and Scottish Governments to the Fiscal Framework in August 2023, the Committee took evidence from experts as well as the Deputy First Minister. These sessions also informed a government debate on the issue.

As part of its focus on the sustainability of public finances and affordability of government decisions, the Committee has continued its robust scrutiny of Financial Memorandums (FM), including the Circular Economy Bill FM and National Care Service Bill FM, both framework bills being co-designed during the passage of the bills. The Committee will return to consider the Scottish Government's proposed changes to the National Care Service Bill and their financial impact in late January 2024.

The Committee has started its scrutiny of the Scottish Budget 2024-25, hearing from the Office for Budget Responsibility and Institute for Fiscal Studies on the UK context, and from the Scottish Fiscal Commission on its forecasts and the budget before Christmas. It took evidence from academics and think-tanks, public sector bodies, local authorities and others on 9 January, and heard from the SPCB and Deputy First Minister on 16 January.

It also heard from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (virtually) at an extra meeting on 18 January.

Public Audit Committee

The Committee held a series of roundtable evidence sessions in November with stakeholders operating within the field of adult mental health to explore how services across Scotland are being delivered. In December, the Committee put the evidence it had heard to the Chief Executive of NHS Scotland and Director-General Health and Social Care and agreed to draft a report on its scrutiny findings.

The Committee also took evidence in a roundtable format in November with relevant stakeholders on the Auditor General for Scotland's briefing, "Scotland's Colleges 2023", which raised significant concerns about the financial sustainability of the college sector. The Committee took evidence from the Director-General Education and Justice and the Scottish Funding Council on the issues raised through its scrutiny of the briefing on 11 January.

During the reporting period, the Committee took evidence from the Auditor General for Scotland on his report, "The 2022/23 audit of the Scottish Government Consolidated Accounts". The report highlighted the need for the Scottish Government to develop a clearer plan to reform public services in Scotland. The Committee also took evidence from the Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government on the report on 18 January.

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

In follow up to the Committee's 2022 report on Kinship Care, the Committee held an evidence session with the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise looking at how work is progressing on providing kinship carers more information about the support available, including the interaction with other social security benefits and seeking more information about the roll-out of the National Allowance to address inconsistencies of support across local authority areas.

Continuing its work on tackling poverty, the Committee published on 23 November its cross-cutting report into tackling child poverty through parental employment. Recommendations were wide ranging covering several policy areas such as governance, childcare, education, training, financial support, transport, employment and fair work.

Evidence taking on Mark Griffin's Scottish Employment Injuries Advisory Council Bill was concluded. The Bill seeks to establish an Advisory Council be established to provide expertise about support for people living with a workplace injury or disease, as the Scottish Government is due to start delivering its replacement benefit to Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit by March 2026. A Stage 1 Report will be published shortly.

In January 2024 the Committee heard from the Scottish Fiscal Commission and the Cabinet for Social Justice on the Scottish Budget 2024-25.

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

The Committee's main work during this period has been continued scrutiny of the Circular Economy Bill, including visits and outreach. The Committee also dealt with an appointments process for the Scottish Land Commission that was more contentious than originally anticipated when the Committee had agreed an approach to the process with the Scottish Government some months earlier.

The Committee was, in the end, able to agree a report to the Parliament on the issue, although it split along party lines on the key issue of recommending to the Parliament the appointment of the proposed Chair without taking evidence from them.

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

The Committee held a Chamber debate on 16 November on its report on "Culture in Communities: The Challenges and Opportunities of a Place-Based Approach to Culture".

The Convener and Deputy Convener attended the fourth meeting of the UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly on 4-5 December, with the Convener given an opportunity to speak in the plenary session to highlight the evidence the Committee had received on the challenges faced by artists touring in the EU post-Brexit.

On 8 January, the Committee held an event in collaboration with the University of Strathclyde, which I also attended, to highlight its recent key report on How Devolution is Changing Post-EU. The report recommended the establishment of a new Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Devolved Governments to specifically address how devolution functions outside of the EU. The event was followed by a Chamber debate on the report on 9 January.

Cross-committee on Tackling Drug Deaths and Drug Harm

The Social Justice and Social Security Committee, the Criminal Justice Committee and the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee held a joint evidence session in November with the Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy to scrutinise the Scottish Government's progress on tackling drugs death and drugs harm and its ongoing response. This approach drew together the different focus and expertise of the Committees to strengthen scrutiny of this issue.

The Joint Committee has raised a number of issues with the Minister following this evidence session.

SPICe

SPICe produced a briefing at the start of the session setting out what researchers thought would be the key issues that the Parliament would be considering over Session 6. This was [updated](#) in November 2023, halfway through the session, to reflect progress since 2021 and include new issues which had emerged since the start of Session.

SPICe hosted two COP28 events in conjunction with the Futures Forum - these included direct interaction with the first ever 'parliamentary pavilion' in the UN Blue Zone at the talks. On 6 December 2023, there was an update on the conference, chaired by Edward Mountain MSP. On 11 December 2023, the Presiding Officer hosted 'Code Red for Parliaments: what next?'

SPICe has produced key resources in response to the Budget:

- [Scottish Budget 2024-25: in the bleak midwinter](#) (blog)
- [Scottish Budget 2024-25 infographic](#)
- [Scottish Budget 2024-25 taxes infographic](#)
- [Scottish Budget 2024-25](#) (briefing)

Two SPICe fellowships were set up to support the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee's (CPPPC) recommendations on institutionalising deliberative democracy. The first, on understanding how text analysis could support following the "journey" of evidence, has concluded; [an initial blog has been published](#); and the Public Engagement Group has given suggestions for applying and progressing this learning. The second fellowship, on developing a practice framework for people's panels, is expected to report in February 2024. SPICe breakfast briefings covering both will be scheduled in due course.

Parliamentary Services

Engagement and Communications

Events and Exhibitions

The Scottish Parliament held its first **Summit to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities** on Saturday 25 November, chaired by the Deputy Presiding Officer, Annabelle Ewing MSP. This hybrid summit with over 180 attendees was a day of celebration for all, where guests heard from keynote speakers including gold medal winning Paralympian and campaigner, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson DBE and disabled activist and campaigner, Jim Elder-Woodward OBE on breaking down social barriers and the fight for equality and human rights. A cross-party panel discussion and Q&A took place where British Sign Language (BSL) was used by panelists for the first time in the Scottish Parliament.

The Rinconada Chamber Orchestra from Sistema Scotland's Big Noise Raploch performed a selection of traditional Scottish music for building users

at lunchtime and then again on Wednesday 29 November in the Scottish Parliament's Garden Lobby as part of celebrations for St Andrew's Day.

The **10th annual Scottish Public Service Awards** organised by Holyrood Communications and co-hosted by the Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP and the Deputy First Minister was held on Wednesday 6 December. The event celebrated the outstanding achievements within Scotland's civic landscape.

To celebrate the start of **Chanukah** the Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP hosted a reception on Thursday 7 December. The Chanukiah was displayed in The Holyrood Room and lit by Rabbi Ruben, Senior Rabbi in Scotland during the lighting ceremony. On Friday 8 December the Chanukiah was moved to the Main Hall for the remaining seven days of Chanukah, lit each day by a member of the Jewish community.

The Scottish Parliament Choir made their debut by performing a selection of festive songs for building users at lunchtime on Thursday 14 December on the Garden Lobby steps. They also performed as part of the Christmas Carol Service programme on Wednesday 20 December.

The Scottish Parliament's annual **Christmas Carol Service** returned on Wednesday 20 December and was hosted by the Presiding Officer. The event included carols and readings from Members and SPCB staff plus performances from the Scottish Parliament Choir, Newtongrange Silver Band and the Calton Consort.

The annual **Consular Corps' Burns Supper** hosted by the Presiding Officer takes place on Wednesday 24 January 2024. Members along with members of the Scottish Consular Corps come together to celebrate Scotland's National Bard in an evening that will feature traditional Scottish music, poetry and song performed by artists from across Scotland.

Languages

In November, Bòrd na Gàidhlig responded to our Gaelic Language Plan 3 progress report (covering 2021-2022) and commended us for our work on social media (particularly on corporate channels), education resources and our work around normalisation. They also stated that they were looking to see "an increase in the use of Gaelic as a result of the progress that the organisation has made by providing language training to staff".

The next annual progress report covering 2022-2023 is due at the end of February and will be submitted to the SPCB in early February. In the meantime, our Gaelic Language Plan 4 is now approved and published.

Our first BSL Plan expires in 2024 and we are working on developing our next six-year plan. This is expected to come to the SPCB in May and for public consultation in over summer. We are required to publish by the end of 2024.

Our Languages Officers are continuing to work with clerks and support the Members and public engagement in the scrutiny of the Scottish Languages Bill. This is providing useful experience for the planned update in 2024 of the SPCB's Languages Policy.

Committee Engagement

Plans are well underway for our next deliberative event, a people's panel undertaking post-legislative scrutiny of part of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act. 25 randomly selected and diverse members of the public have been recruited and will be in the Parliament for two weekends in February and March to learn, deliberate and make recommendations to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. The event will be independently evaluated, and the learning will feed into developing a blueprint for the use of deliberative democracy in Session 7, as recommended by the CPPPC Committee and endorsed by the Parliament in October 2023.

During the autumn, the Participation and Communities Team (PACT) supported the pre-Budget scrutiny work of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee. They worked with the Whole Family Equality Project, an existing lived experience panel of ethnically diverse people from across Edinburgh, to help them learn about the Scottish Budget, explore barriers to participation and use their learning to generate questions which the Committee then put to the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees. Participants reported that they felt safe, supported and listened to and grew in confidence through the process. This was the first time a deliberative approach has been used in this way in the Parliament and the lessons learned will be carried forward to future participative and budget scrutiny work.

PACT also continues to support extensive committee engagement with a wide variety of people on a range of often highly sensitive topics. A recent example is the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform Bill where PACT worked closely with clerks to support individuals giving evidence who are survivors of a serious sexual crime or a serious crime.

Taking a trauma informed approach, they worked closely with organisations supporting victims to enable a total of 15 individuals to give evidence in both public and private sessions. Each of the sessions was carefully designed and planned to take account of the very sensitive nature of individuals' experiences and the potential risk of re-traumatisation as well as the legal implications in hearing evidence from those involved in past or current criminal proceedings.

A working group of staff from public facing offices across the Parliament has been established to consider how we can embed trauma-informed working in our work with the public, to ensure that members of the public whatever their background are welcomed in a safe and supportive way. An action plan will be developed, which will include ensuring that relevant staff are trained, and priority services are designed with a trauma-informed lens.

International Relations

The International Relations office hosted six inward visits.

Canadian/UK Interparliamentary Association

In mid-November the International Relations Office hosted a seven-member, cross-party delegation of the Canada/UK Interparliamentary Association. The Chair of the Association and delegation leader, James Maloney MP, met with the Presiding Officer, Finlay Carson MSP and Collette Stevenson MSP as part of the April 2023 outward to North America. In addition to the main areas of interest flagged up by the delegation, this visit was an ideal opportunity to continue those discussions held in Ottawa with the Presiding Officer, Finlay Carson and Collette Stevenson.

The implications of Brexit on devolution as well as the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement were of primary interest to the delegation. Meetings were held with Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee officials as well as members of the Economy and Fair Work Committee. The delegation was also interested in security issues, particularly for Members in their local offices, and meetings were arranged with the Parliament's Head of Security in that regard.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

In November following the Scottish Parliament's Disability Summit to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Jeremy Balfour MSP wrote a blog on [How to host a disability outreach event in Parliament](#), which was published on CPA's webpage. In December, Jeremy was elected as the Champion for British Islands and Mediterranean Region on the [Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Network](#) (CPwD), a post he will hold until the last CPwD meeting in 2025.

Facilities Management

Crèche Services – Variation to Registration Restrictions

A variation to our registration for the provision of Crèche services submitted by our service providers, My Ohana, to the Care Inspectorate has now been approved. This will now extend the period of time a child can use the Crèche per session to three hours per day and four hours if only attending for a single session per week. This will mean the service can provide up to nine hours of childcare per week for users, rather than just the four it provides currently, which is seen as a positive step going forward. It is hoped that this change will provide more comprehensive support and better flexibility for those who use the service.

We will be continuing to explore if other options are available to improve the service and to lift the restrictions further, particularly relating to direct outdoor access from the Crèche. We are also in the process of developing a range of childcare options in addition to this, which will hopefully provide a more

complete range of alternatives for those who require our services to support their childcare needs.

Catering Services – Stuart Rose: Sodexo Employee of the Year Award

Stuart Rose, Executive Chef with our Catering Service providers Sodexo, has been awarded Sodexo Employee of the Year from a possible 40,000 Sodexo colleagues across the UK and Ireland. Stuart has been at the Parliament for over 20 years, working his way up to his current position. He leads an incredibly dedicated team, which adapt to the ever-evolving needs of the Parliament and works closely with building users, working groups and Sodexo's supply chain. He is also instrumental in supporting colleges and young people to develop into the food services industry. His dedication, contribution and attitude has been rightly recognised and this award is thoroughly well deserved.