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Web

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Committee reform



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Contents

Introduction	1
Executive Summary	2
The role of committees in effective scrutiny	4
Key principles	5
Areas for change	5
Members' capacity	5
Capacity of committees	9
Using committees' powers	12
Summary of recommendations	14
Annexe A: Committee achievements in session 4	16
Challenging government and influencing policy	16
Hearing and raising people's concerns	16
Annexe B: Extract from minutes and associated written evidence	18
Annexe C: Other written evidence	21

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

1. The remit of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee is to consider and report on—
 - a. the practice and procedures of the Parliament in relation to its business;
 - b. whether a member's conduct is in accordance with these Rules and any Code of Conduct for members, matters relating to members interests, and any other matters relating to the conduct of members in carrying out their Parliamentary duties;
 - c. the adoption, amendment and application of any Code of Conduct for members; and
 - d. matters relating to public appointments in Scotland.
2. Where the Committee considers it appropriate, it may by motion recommend that a member's rights and privileges be withdrawn to such extent and for such period as are specified in the motion.



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Introduction

1. In June 2015 the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments (SPPA) Committee reported on a proposal for committee conveners to be elected by the whole Parliament.¹ We concluded that there were much broader issues about committees which needed to be looked at first.
2. We felt there was little point in introducing a new procedure for conveners before we were confident that we had the right structure, size and number of committees, with the right resources and the most effective working practices. So we agreed to review the operation of committees and make proposals about structure and working practices to increase committee effectiveness.
3. The best time to make significant changes to working practices is at the start of a new session. The Committee hopes that this report will lead to discussion across the Parliament and broad agreement on the steps needed to increase committees' effectiveness next session.

Executive Summary

The changes proposed by the Committee aim to make committees more effective at influencing, improving and reviewing policy and legislation. The Parliament needs to respond to the huge increase in public engagement with politics across Scotland following the independence referendum. Further powers for the Parliament in areas such as taxation and social security will broaden the scrutiny activity of committees.

There are already many examples of committees working with great effectiveness. But more changes are needed if we are to see committees working at this level of effectiveness more of the time.

We agreed some key principles to keep in mind when considering possible changes:

- Members need to be able to engage fully with the work of any committee they are on. The overall number of committees and committee places should allow for this.
- Any changes should support maintaining existing high attendance rates at committees.
- Continuity of membership on committees is desirable.
- Committees should have the capacity to initiate their own inquiry work and, should they choose, to develop committee bills and post-legislative scrutiny, as well as scrutinising Scottish Government and Members' bills.
- Committee remits should achieve a reasonable balance of workload between committees while still giving a coherent focus for each committee's work.
- The status of committees should be recognised through appropriate resourcing.
- Committees should set strategic priorities at the start of each session and use these to inform priorities for their forward work programmes.
- Committees should focus on the potential outcomes of their work and give priority to areas where they are likely to have greatest impact.

We heard some evidence about whether the Parliament has enough members to do its work, once it takes on significant further powers. The Scotland Bill would give the Scottish Parliament new powers in this area. In advance of that, the Committee has not reached a fixed view on the arguments for and against additional members.

We recognise the additional workload when members sit on more than one committee. Smaller committees can deliver focused and effective scrutiny. **We recommend that next session's committees should normally have a maximum of seven members.**

Committees generally have a high turnover of members and this can be a real difficulty. **We recommend that in proposing changes to committee membership, the Bureau should attempt to minimise turnover of members.**

We do not propose changes to the way in which the remits of subject committees are decided. The exception is the Justice Committee which is more consistently burdened with legislation than any other committee. **We recommend that next session the Parliament should consider establishing two justice committees with different remits.**

In a previous report on post-legislative scrutiny, we suggested steps that committees could take to increase post-legislative scrutiny. We think a further step is needed to build this scrutiny routinely into committees' work. **We recommend that, within 3-5 years of Royal Assent, the Scottish Government should be required to publish a post-legislative report on the implementation of each Act of the Scottish Parliament.**

During this session, the Parliamentary week was reorganised and this has created great difficulties for Thursday morning committees. Other concerns about the new Parliamentary week were also raised and the Parliament needs to return to these. **We recommend that, early next session, our successor committee reviews the changes made in session 4 to the structure of the Parliamentary week and considers whether they strike the right balance between Chamber and Committee time and members' constituency commitments.**

One way to extend the capacity of committees is to make greater use of reporters. The use of reporters seems to have reduced over time. **We recommend that committees at the start of next session discuss the potential to make more use of reporters and that this is reviewed by our successor committee.**

Nothing we have heard has persuaded us that the introduction of elected conveners would result in more effective committees or conveners. **We do not recommend that the Parliament makes any change to the current system of choosing committee conveners.**

The role of committees in effective scrutiny

4. The aim of any changes must be to make committees more effective at scrutinising legislation and government policy and holding the government to account. The independence referendum led to a huge increase in public engagement with politics across Scotland and the Parliament needs to continue to respond to this. The arrival of further powers for the Parliament next year, in areas such as taxation and social security, will broaden the scrutiny activity of committees.
5. Effective scrutiny is about influencing, improving and reviewing policy and legislation. The Centre for Public Scrutiny suggests that good scrutiny:
 - involves constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge
 - amplifies the voices and concerns of the public
 - is led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
 - and drives improvement in public services.²
6. We emphasise that there are already many examples of committees working with great effectiveness – challenging the government, questioning Ministers and officials, encouraging debate, airing public concerns and giving a voice to under-represented groups.
7. At Annexe A we have listed some of the many examples of members of committees working constructively together and making full use of their powers and influence. However, more changes are needed if we are to see committees working at this level of effectiveness more of the time.

Key principles

8. We agreed some key principles to keep in mind when considering possible changes. For committees to carry out their scrutiny role effectively—
- Members need to be able to engage fully with the work of any committee they are on. The overall number of committees and committee places should allow for this.
 - Any changes should support maintaining existing high attendance rates at committees.
 - Continuity of membership on committees is desirable.
 - Committees should have the capacity to initiate their own inquiry work and, should they choose, to develop committee bills and post-legislative scrutiny, as well as scrutinising Scottish Government and Members' bills.
 - Committee remits should achieve a reasonable balance of workload between committees while still giving a coherent focus for each committee's work.
 - The status of committees should be recognised through appropriate resourcing.
 - Committees should set strategic priorities at the start of each session and use these to inform priorities for their forward work programmes.
 - Committees should focus on the potential outcomes of their work and give priority to areas where they are likely to have greatest impact.

Areas for change

Members' capacity

- *Members need to be able to engage fully with the work of any committee they are on and the overall number of committees and committee places should allow for this*
- *Any changes should support maintaining existing high attendance rates at committees*
- *Continuity of membership on committees is desirable*

Number of members

9. Our inquiry looked at whether committee members have the time and resources to do their work. So it was perhaps inevitable that there was some discussion about whether the Parliament has enough members to do its work, once it takes on significant further powers.

- ” The big elephant in the room is whether we have enough members in this Parliament to facilitate committees. That is not something on which I am going to take a position. It is a tough question to agree on. We have 129 members, but once we take out the Presiding Officer, the ministers and the party spokespeople we are left with a small number of members.³
- ” My personal view is...that there should be an additional two members from each region. I would not increase the burden on the public purse, as I would reduce the number of members of Parliament who represent Scotland at Westminster.⁴
- ” The ideal solution would be to have more members, but that simply will not happen...the intellectual argument is overwhelming but will not win. We have to accept that at this stage, so we have to look at other resourcing that will allow members to be more efficient and effective.⁵
- ” Whether we are bold and brave or we shy away from increasing the number of MSPs, I am not convinced that it is the best way of managing the increased workload. I would much prefer us to look at other ways of bringing extra-parliamentary scrutiny into the process.⁶
- ” There may be an appetite for more members, but if you asked the public whether they wanted more politicians, I think that we know the likely answer to that. However, we know that there was an appetite for additional powers; we also know that the perception is that insufficient scrutiny takes place in here.⁷
10. We note that the Scotland Bill currently before the UK Parliament would give the Scottish Parliament new powers in this area. In advance of that, the Committee has not reached a fixed view on the arguments for and against additional members. We have instead focused on steps that can be taken within our existing powers.

Size of committees

11. MSPs take committee membership seriously. Scottish Parliament committees have a very high level of attendance: most members of committees are at most meetings, as well as undertaking visits and other public events outside of formal meetings.
12. The Committee recognises the additional workload when members sit on more than one committee. At the moment, 39 members sit on two committees and four on three committees. It is likely to be more challenging for these members to engage fully in the work of each committee compared to members who can concentrate on a single committee.
13. At the start of this session, there were 14 committees. In the course of the session Welfare Reform, Devolution (Further Powers) and the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing were added – more committees than ever before. Some of these committees have nine or even 11 members. With a maximum of 90-100

members available to sit on committees there will continue to be members on two (or more) committees if we continue with this number and size of committees.

14. If the next Parliament aimed for around 14 committees, with no more than seven members each, the number of committee places to be filled would be similar to the number of members available to serve on committees. Each additional committee, or each committee of more than seven, will increase the number of members who have to sit on two committees.
15. We know from experience of seven-member committees that they can carry out focused and effective scrutiny. In some cases – and we note that the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee is now operating well with five members – an even smaller committee may be appropriate.

We recommend that next session's committees should normally have a maximum of seven members.

16. Committee places are allocated broadly in line with the balance of political parties in the Parliament. We note that this still leaves flexibility to ensure that the voices of smaller parties are heard within committees. This has been addressed in different ways in each session, to reflect the make-up of that particular Parliament.
17. We recognise that reducing the size of committees may have an effect on the way that smaller parties are accommodated. It is for this reason that we have suggested a normal, rather than an absolute, maximum of seven members.

Committee turnover

18. Committees generally have a high turnover of members and this can be a real difficulty. For example, over the session the Local Government Committee has had 23 different members and only one of its seven members has been on the committee for the whole session. The nine-member Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has had 25 different members over the session and only has two of its original members. Only half of the original 14 committees have the same convener as they had at the start of the session.
19. We are not suggesting that there should be no changes to membership. New members bring new ideas and refresh a committee's approach. But where many members have not had a chance to hear the evidence in an inquiry, it is more difficult for a committee to make informed, challenging recommendations.
20. Committee "churn" can be hard to avoid. Most often, it stems from ministerial reshuffles or changes in party leadership. For smaller parties, a big new piece of work (such as the Scotland Bill) may mean that responsibilities have to be moved around.



It is best to try to minimise churn, because a member who has limited knowledge and experience of the subject matter of a committee of which they are made a member might build up such knowledge and experience over a period. If we then take that person off the committee and put on someone else who has limited knowledge or experience, we disrupt not only the members but the committee.⁸

We recommend that in proposing changes to committee membership, the Bureau should attempt to minimise turnover of members.

Capacity of committees

- *Committees should have the capacity to initiate their own inquiry work and, should they choose, to develop committee bills and post-legislative scrutiny, as well as scrutinising Scottish Government and Members' bills*
- *Committee remits should achieve a reasonable balance of workload between committees while still giving a coherent focus for each committee's work*

Committee remits

21. We considered whether there were other ways of organising committee remits to achieve a better balance between the workloads of different committees. We concluded that, over the course of a session, most committees manage to give time to their own inquiry priorities. (There is a separate issue about post-legislative scrutiny which we discuss below.) This is even true in some of the most heavily-loaded legislative areas such as health and rural affairs.
22. There are advantages in the current approach, where committee remits are broadly aligned to ministerial remits. This gives clarity about where responsibility for scrutiny lies, while allowing some flexibility.


We do not therefore think that there is a case for significant changes to the way in which the remits of subject committees are decided.

Justice committee

23. The one exception is the Justice Committee which, in every session of the Parliament to date, has been more consistently burdened with legislation than any other committee. In session 2 there was an experiment with two Justice Committees sharing the same remit. We do not suggest repeating this approach, which only led to confusion. However we note that, in this session, the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing has worked effectively to pick up major issues which the main committee did not have time to cover.
24. We do not recommend sub-committees as a long term solution. We think that they raise issues of accountability to the main committee which are difficult to manage. We think the Parliament could consider for next session establishing two justice committees but this time with distinct remits – analogous to the split in the House of Commons between Home Affairs and Justice.
25. We recognise that there are downsides to this option. We point out that the alternatives are also unsatisfactory: they are for the Scottish Government to bring forward less legislation in this area; or for the Parliament to accept that the Justice Committee exists mainly to scrutinise bills and will never have much time to initiate its own inquiries – a clearly undesirable scrutiny gap.

We recommend that the Parliament should consider establishing two justice committees next session with different remits. If this option is trialed, we recommend that our successor committee reviews it after the first two years of the session.

Post-legislative scrutiny

26. Throughout this session, we have been told that the Parliament does not do enough post-legislative scrutiny (this was one of the issues raised regularly in our parliamentary reform inquiry, leading to the 2013 inquiry on post-legislative scrutiny). The Parliament scrutinises many bills each year, some of them with very significant costs and promised outcomes. It should also be part of the Parliament's role to go back and see whether those outcomes have been delivered.
27. In our report on this subject in 2013⁹, we suggested a number of steps that committees could take to build post-legislative scrutiny into their work. We still think these are valuable but a further step is needed to build this scrutiny routinely into committees' plans.
28. We put to the Minister for Parliamentary Business the suggestion that, within a certain number of years of a bill being passed, the Scottish Government should produce a report on its implementation, comparing the forecast impacts and costs to what has actually happened. This would be a starting point for committees to carry out their own inquiries into Acts that were of particular significance or where there was some doubt as to their effectiveness.
29. The Minister expressed concerns about this idea:
 If the Government had to do work on every bill that is enacted, for instance, that would use public money. Government resources do not come out of the ether. It is appropriate that post-legislative scrutiny happens and that the committees decide when it happens, but given the size of Scotland's Parliament and Government, a mechanism that said that it should happen all the time would probably not tally with this committee's conclusion.¹⁰
30. However our view is that reviewing the impact of legislation is part of good governance.

We therefore recommend that, within 3-5 years of Royal Assent, the Scottish Government should be required to publish a post-legislative report on the implementation of each Act of the Scottish Parliament. We stress that this would be in addition to any work that committees initiate for themselves.

Time for committees

31. During this session, the Parliamentary week was reorganised. Instead of the previous structure of a day and a half for committees followed by a day and a half for the Chamber, we now have three mornings for committees each followed by an afternoon of chamber business.
32. The impact is greatest on Thursday morning committees, because General Questions begins at 11.40 am. If committees start at 9 am they have two and half hours at most to complete their business. Committees hearing from panels of witnesses often feel very squeezed in this time slot.

” One of the challenges for Thursday morning meetings is getting witnesses around the table for an 8.45, 8.55 or 9 am start. It is sometimes difficult to get witnesses to Edinburgh and around the committee table in time.¹¹

33. Whilst more time could be found for committees if they met at the same time as the Chamber, this is not something we want to see. It would detract from both. There is existing provision in standing orders for committees to request to meet alongside the chamber in exceptional circumstances. We agree with Minister for Parliamentary Business that this is sufficient—

” ...if a committee feels that it needs to meet at that time, we should look at its demand and at what the chamber business is at the time to decide whether it would be appropriate. We should try to manage the conflicts between committee pressures and plenary time case by case. It should not be routine for committees to meet when plenary business is taking place.¹²

34. A number of members commented to us more generally about the organisation of the Parliamentary week.

” I am also not convinced that the topical questions session has been a particular success, to be honest. If something is to be moved, or even removed, topical questions should be the first to go.¹³

” We used to have First Minister’s questions on a Thursday afternoon and, if I recall correctly, the item was moved to 12 noon to suit the broadcasters. I do not think that we should be at all shy about rethinking whether 12 noon on a Thursday is the right slot for it.¹⁴

” Moving FMQs is an excellent idea. A lot of people come to the Parliament from far and wide and it is difficult for them to get here and get through the sausage machine at the front door early enough to get into question time. That has caused difficulties for people from my constituency, which is not the furthest away.¹⁵

” In our most recent reform of plenary business, we lost the Thursday morning session, and that has already caused problems at stage 3.¹⁶

35. These issues are beyond the scope of this inquiry but are matters that the Parliament needs to return to.

We recommend that, early next session, our successor committee reviews the changes made in session 4 to the structure of the Parliamentary week and considers whether they strike the right balance between Chamber and Committee time and members' constituency commitments.

Making use of reporters

36. One way to extend the capacity of committees is to make greater use of reporters. As long as adequate support is available from the clerking and research teams, a reporter can carry out a valuable role. The reporter's work may inform a future inquiry or give the basis for questions in an evidence session; or even be adopted by the full committee as a committee report.
37. The use of reporters seems to have reduced over time. This may be linked to issues about the number of committees that members are on and the turnover of members. A member on more than one committee will inevitably have less time to take on additional roles. A committee may well be less confident about delegating work to a member who has not been on the committee for long.

We recommend that at the start of next session, discussions on working practices at committees' initial away days include discussing the potential to use reporters. We also recommend that, later in the session, our successor committee reviews what use is being made of reporters.

Using committees' powers

38. Some of the changes we would like to see cannot be achieved through procedural changes: they are about the culture of committees. Several of our witnesses commented on this—

” Good government and good governance require effective challenge, and the committees really have to be able to challenge effectively. My experience... is that the committees are not yet resourced adequately or enabled to play that challenging role.¹⁷

” It is very important that all committees and all parties take the role of committees seriously, and that conveners take their role seriously. We cannot have patsy conveners of any political colour who will not ask a difficult question because they think that it might embarrass a colleague. If I do not ask a question, I expect someone else to ask it. We have a duty to the Parliament and to the wider Scottish public¹⁸

” ...I have seen committees change as they have gone along. Members become more confident and more independent minded about pursuing issues. We should develop those parliamentary skills and that sense of belonging to the committee¹⁹

39. Committees have many powers to support their scrutiny role. They can—

- **Recommend to the Parliament that it disagree with the general principles of a bill.** On the few occasions that this has happened, it has had a strong impact.
- **Recommend that subordinate legislation is not passed.** When this happens, it usually leads to its withdrawal and reconsideration.
- **Recommend actions for the Scottish Government.** Unanimous recommendations, based on evidence, can have a strong impact on policy though these would be even more influential if the government knew that committees would also be systematic in following up on recommendations.
- **Hold debates on subjects of their choosing** to raise the profile of an issue and get a response from the minister.
- **Agree amendments at a bill's committee stage** to address issues raised in reports on the general principles of the bill at Stage 1. Stage 1 reports can also influence the amendments lodged by the member in charge of the bill (as highlighted by the Minister for Parliamentary Business²⁰ in relation to the mental health and community empowerment bills this session).
- **Question ministers or senior officials in person or in writing.**
- **Exercise their formal powers to call for witnesses and documents.** This is a power that is rarely used but the fact that it exists means that committees will generally be able to insist on being provided with the information they need.

40. It was suggested to us in our previous inquiry that elected conveners might be a catalyst for the kind of culture change discussed above. However we have not heard anything in the course of our inquiry to persuade us that this is a change which would result in more effective committees or conveners.

41. The status of conveners depends upon how effectively they fulfil their role, rather than their being elected or paid.

We do not recommend that the Parliament makes any change to the current system of choosing committee conveners.

Summary of recommendations

Next session's committees should normally have a maximum of seven members.

In proposing changes to committee membership, the Bureau should attempt to minimise turnover of members.

We do not think that there is a case for significant changes to the way in which the remits of subject committees are decided.

The Parliament should consider establishing two justice committees next session with different remits. If this option is trialled, our successor committee should review it after the first two years of the session.

Within 3-5 years of Royal Assent, the Scottish Government should be required to publish a post-legislative report on the implementation of each Act of the Scottish Parliament.

Early next session, our successor committee should review the changes made in session 4 to the structure of the Parliamentary week and consider whether they strike the right balance between Chamber and Committee time and members' constituency commitments.

At the start of next session, discussions on working practices at committees' initial away days should include discussing the potential to use reporters. Later in the session, our successor committee should review what use is being made of reporters.

We do not recommend that the Parliament makes any change to the current system of choosing committee conveners.

¹ Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee 8th Report 2013 (Session 4) *Post-Legislative Scrutiny*.

² Centre for Public Scrutiny mission and purpose.

³ Christina McKelvie, Convener of European and External Relations Committee, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 10 September 2015*.

⁴ Jackson Carlaw MSP, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 24 September 2015*.

⁵ Michael Russell MSP, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 24 September 2015*.

⁶ Patrick Harvie MSP, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 24 September 2015*.

⁷ John Finnie, Business Manager for Scottish Greens and Independent Group, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 8 October 2015*.

⁸ James Kelly, Business Manager for Scottish Labour, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 8 October 2015*.

⁹ *Post-legislative scrutiny* 8th report, 2013 (Session 4).

¹⁰ Joe Fitzpatrick, Minister for Parliamentary Business, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 8 October 2015*.

¹¹ Christina McKelvie, Convener of European and External Relations Committee, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 10 September 2015*.

¹² Joe Fitzpatrick, Minister for Parliamentary Business, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 8 October 2015*.

¹³ Kenneth Gibson, Convener of Finance Committee, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 10 September 2015*.

¹⁴ Murdo Fraser, Convener of Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 24 September 2015*.

¹⁵ Kenneth Gibson, Convener of Finance Committee, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 10 September 2015*.

¹⁶ Alison McInnes, Business Manager to Scottish Liberal Democrats, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 8 October 2015*.

¹⁷ Michael Russell MSP, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 24 September 2015*.

¹⁸ Kenneth Gibson, Convener of Finance Committee, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 10 September 2015*.

¹⁹ Alison McInnes, Business Manager to Scottish Liberal Democrats, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 8 October 2015*.

²⁰ Joe Fitzpatrick, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee *Official Report 8 October 2015*.

Annexe A: Committee achievements in session 4

Challenging government and influencing policy

- The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee held an urgent inquiry in response to the crisis in the Scottish dairy industry. The Scottish Government's Dairy Plan addressed many of the Committee's recommendations. The RACCE Committee's recommendations on deer management formed the basis of the Government's approach on deer in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill.
- The Public Petitions Committee has achieved several changes to policy through highlighting matters raised in petitions. For example in response to a petition on chronic pain, the Government announced the establishment of a chronic pain centre.
- The Justice Committee's report on the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill suggested a number of improvements which led to Scottish Government amendments.
- The Justice Sub-Committee on Policing questioned Police Scotland on matters such as response times and stop and search – a policy change on stop and search was announced during a Committee questioning session.
- The European and External Relations Committee responded to rising concerns about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) by holding an urgent inquiry, with evidence from Trade Unions, the third sector and business. This was followed by an evening event hosted with the European Parliament where the public could raise concerns about TTIP.
- The Education and Culture Committee's Stage 1 report on the Education (Scotland) Bill, particularly the section on additional support for learning, prompted the Scottish Government to make a series of amendments to the Bill.
- The Scottish Government acknowledged that the recommendations in the Health and Sport Committee's report on access to new medicines led to improvements in the Scottish Medicines Consortium's procedures for evaluating and accessing new medicines.

Hearing and raising people's concerns

- The Education and Culture Committee scrutinised Mark Griffin's British Sign Language (BSL) Bill. The Facebook group that the Committee set up for BSL users attracted more than 2,200 individuals who posted hundreds of comments, including BSL videos.

- The Welfare Reform Committee's "Your Say" initiative has given a voice to seldom-heard individuals and groups with direct experience of the impacts of welfare reform.
- The Local Government and Regeneration Committee used social media, including YouTube videos which attracted over 2000 views, to prompt views on the Community Empowerment Bill. Thirty people - who were unlikely to have replied to a more traditional call for evidence - responded with their views.
- The Devolution (Further Powers) Committee's report on votes for 16-17 year olds was informed by an online survey which was completed by 1,200 first-time voters. A further 200 young people were able to express their views at the Parliament Days in Fort William and Levenmouth.
- The Devolution (Further Powers) Committee's Interim Report – and subsequent analysis – on the Scotland Bill has been highly influential in shaping amendments to the Bill from the UK Government, particularly at Report Stage in the House of Commons. The Secretary of State for Scotland is on record publicly noting that many of the changes he chose to make were in direct response to the cross-party recommendations of the Committee. The Education and Culture Committee received over 2,500 responses to its survey on parental involvement with schools, which informed a committee evidence session on educational attainment.
- For the Air Weapons and Licensing Bill, the Local Government and Regeneration Committee produced a short YouTube video about the sections on taxi licensing. This got over 900 views and attracted submissions from trade bodies and taxi drivers, none of whom had responded to more traditional requests for views.
- The Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee reacted to concerns about access to railway stations by issuing an online survey which was promoted via social media and achieved 4,875 responses.
- The Equal Opportunities Committee met on Islay to hear about issues of social isolation affecting the island. While there, it hosted a ceilidh attended by around 100 local people who had a chance to discuss their concerns informally with committee members.
- The RACCE Committee carried out an unprecedented level of public engagement on the Land Reform Bill, including three external meetings, in Orkney, Skye and Dumfries; two packed public meetings in Jura and Dumfries and fact-finding visits to Falkland, Kinghorn, Jura, Islay, the Borders and Edinburgh.

Annexe B: Extract from minutes and associated written evidence

12th Meeting 2015 (Session 4), Thursday 10 September 2015

Decision on taking business in private: The Committee agreed its consideration of evidence heard on its inquiry into committee reform should be taken in private at future meetings.

Inquiry into committee reform: The Committee took evidence, in roundtable format, from—

Kenneth Gibson;
Christina McKelvie

Inquiry into committee reform (in private): The Committee considered the evidence heard earlier in the meeting.

14th Meeting 2015 (Session 4), Thursday 24 September 2015

Decision on taking business in private: The Committee agreed to take items 4 and 5 in private.

Inquiry into committee reform: The Committee took evidence from—

Jackson Carlaw;
Murdo Fraser;
Patrick Harvie;
Hugh Henry;
Michael Russell.

Inquiry into committee reform (in private): The Committee agreed its approach to the next stage in its inquiry.

Inquiry into committee reform (in private): The Committee considered the evidence heard earlier in the meeting.

16th Meeting 2015 (Session 4), Thursday 8 October 2015

Decision on taking business in private: The Committee agreed that its consideration of a draft report on its inquiry into committee reform and issues papers on Members Interests, the Scotland Bill and committee reform should be taken in private at future meetings.

Inquiry into committee reform: The Committee took evidence from—

Joe FitzPatrick, Minister for Parliamentary Business, Scottish Government;

John Finnie, Business Manager, Independent/Green Group;

James Kelly, Business Manager, Scottish Labour;

John Lamont, Business Manager, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party;

Alison McInnes, Business Manager, Scottish Liberal Democrats

Inquiry into committee reform (in private): The Committee considered the evidence heard earlier in the meeting.

17th Meeting 2015 (Session 4), Thursday 5 November 2015

Inquiry into committee reform (in private): The Committee considered issues for a draft report.

19th Meeting 2015 (Session 4), Thursday 19 November 2015

Inquiry into committee reform (in private): The Committee considered an issues paper.

20th Meeting 2015 (Session 4), Thursday 26 November 2015

Inquiry into committee reform (in private): The Committee considered an issues paper.

23rd Meeting 2015 (Session 4), Thursday 17 December 2015

Inquiry into committee reform (in private): The Committee considered a draft report.

1st Meeting 2016 (Session 4), Thursday 14 January 2015

Inquiry into committee reform (in private): The Committee agreed a draft report.

Annexe C: Other written evidence

- [John Mason MSP \(79KB pdf\)](#)

