

Chief Executive's Report to the SPCB May 2023

Introduction

This Report looks at activities across the organisation from April to mid-May.

Items highlighted include:

- Changes to ministerial roles following the appointment of a new First Minister
- An overview of committee and engagement activities
- An update from People and Culture

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Overview of Parliamentary Activities

Legislation and Parliamentary Business

Following changes made to ministerial roles by the new First Minister, the Bureau agreed an approach to adjusting committee remits that will provide continuity in the subject matter for which existing committees are responsible. This approach is consistent with committees being established for the duration of the Session, allows for the retention of knowledge in conducting scrutiny of the Scottish Government and supports ongoing development of relationships with key stakeholders.

The Bureau also considered correspondence from the SPCB on late sittings and arrangements are being made for a follow-up discussion between both bodies.

Scrutiny

Committees

The **COVID-19 Recovery Committee** recently concluded its four-month long inquiry into Long COVID and what action the Scottish Government is taking to address Long COVID and post COVID syndrome. The inquiry focused on three main themes: awareness and recognition; therapy and rehabilitation; and study and research. In addition to issuing a call for written views and taking oral evidence, the Committee also held two informal engagement sessions with people and families with lived and living experience of Long COVID. The Committee made a number of recommendations across each of the themes which included addressing the stigma associated with the condition, improving awareness among the medical profession and introducing a single point of contact for patients with Long COVID.

The **Health, Social Care and Sport Committee** currently faces a high degree of uncertainty regarding its future work programme as a consequence of ongoing delays to the introduction and progress of various items of referred legislation.

The Committee published its report on the Patient Safety Commissioner Bill in advance of the Stage 1 debate that took place on 10 May. The Committee has supported the establishment of the Commissioner and officials will now work alongside the Scottish Government to ensure the financial memorandum is as up to date as possible in the light of the Committee's report.

In relation to the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, the Committee has received an indication from the responsible Minister that she wishes to

request a further delay to the Stage 1 deadline to enable the Scottish Government to undertake further engagement and co-design work over the summer period.

In the short term, the Committee is continuing to progress its periodic scrutiny of NHS boards which it plans to conclude with an evidence session with the new Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care in June. The Committee also plans to conclude evidence gathering as part of its inquiry into female participation in sport before the summer recess.

The **Citizens Participation and Public Petitions Committee** continues to meet fortnightly to consider new and continued petitions. The meeting on 19 April included evidence from a petitioner and others on PE1958 (on aftercare for previously looked-after young people); the Committee also agreed to undertake a fact-finding visit on youth violence and take further evidence on the dualling of the A9. The Committee plans to finalise its report on deliberative democracy by the end of June with a view to launching it after the summer recess.

The **Finance and Public Administration Committee** has been undertaking its first inquiry in relation to its public administration remit into Effective Scottish Government Decision-making to bring greater transparency to how government takes decisions and identify from international comparators any areas of improvement. As well as usual methods of gathering evidence, the Committee has held a series of engagement events with civil servants, former civil servants and former Ministers, to hear more about the process of decision-making under different administrations.

The Committee has continued to pursue the Scottish Government for an updated Financial Memorandum (FM) and costings in relation to the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, following the announcement of a further delay at Stage 1. Similar themes are arising in relation to the Children (Care and Justice) FM about not including full costs and so the Committee is due to hear from the relevant Minister on that FM in the coming weeks.

The **Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee** is coming to the end of its post-legislative scrutiny of the Community Empowerment Act (post legislative scrutiny being one of the Conveners Group strategic priorities for Session 6). The Committee's most recent focus has been on Part 2 of the Act, which relates to community planning. The Committee will shortly be reporting after which it intends to take evidence from the Scottish Government reflecting back on the 4 strands of post-legislative scrutiny of the Act undertaken by this Committee and its predecessor committee.

This work has prompted further work and the Committee will shortly be looking at the role of community councils in the 50th year of their existence. Over the course of May, the Committee will also be exploring pressing issues about the quality of housing in Scotland with a particular focus on cladding and damp and mould.

The Committee also held an event with Scotland's Futures Forum on 9 May looking at the future of the relationship between local and national government. This session included keynote speeches from the Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning, the Vice President of COSLA, academics and then working groups in which around 60 people representing local government, academia, the third sector and academics will participate. The Committee hopes this event can give some momentum to the negotiations between local government and national government on a new deal.

The **Economy and Fair Work Committee** continues to meet weekly. It recently concluded its evidence sessions on the just transition for the Grangemouth area inquiry. The Committee expects to report findings prior to summer recess. There was disappointment that INEOS (a key player as the owner of Grangemouth oil refinery complex) turned down the Committee's invitations to give evidence on the record. The Committee also invited a UK Government Minister to give evidence. This invitation was also declined; however, an official was offered in place of the Minister – an offer not taken up by the Committee. In the last few days, the Committee repeated its invitation, offering a further range of dates and agreement was reached for a Minister to give evidence at a meeting.

The committee team, in collaboration with the Institute of Directors and Women's Enterprise Scotland and PACT has set up a witness diversity event to encourage more women to come forward as witnesses. It will involve more than 20 participants.

It is expected that the recently introduced Bankruptcy and Diligence (Scotland) Bill will be referred to the Economy and Fair Work Committee to consider at stage 1. This will be the first legislation for the Committee this Session.

The **Public Audit Committee** recently commenced its scrutiny of the Auditor General for Scotland's audit of Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow (Holdings) Limited (FMPG) by taking evidence from the Auditor General. This report raises several concerns including uncertainty over the final costs required to deliver two new vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides, the longer-term financial viability of FMPG and insufficient governance arrangements in relation to

bonus payments made to senior managers. In terms of next steps, the Committee has agreed to take evidence from FMPG and the Scottish Government at a future meeting.

The Committee will also be progressing other items on its work programme in the coming weeks. This includes taking evidence from the Chief Executive of NHS Scotland and Director-General for Health and Social Care on the Auditor General's report, NHS in Scotland 2022, as well as hearing from HM Revenues and Customs and the Director-General Scottish Exchequer on the administration of Scottish income tax.

The Committee will also take evidence from the Auditor General on his report, How the Scottish Government is set up to deliver climate change goals, which concludes that improvements are required to deliver the country's climate change goals.

The **Rural Affairs and Islands Committee** is concluding its pre-legislative consideration of future agriculture policy. The aim of this work is to take the time to consider the wide range of policy interactions with agricultural support ahead of the introduction of the bill, expected after summer recess.

The Committee is also holding a short inquiry into petition PE1758, to ban greyhound racing, and has launched its call for views ahead of evidence sessions on the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill in June.

Conveners Group

At its most recent meeting, the Conveners Group agreed its work programme for the remainder of the year, focusing on its strategic priorities of net zero and post-EU scrutiny; participation, diversity and inclusion; post legislative scrutiny; and supporting members as Parliamentarians. This includes receiving its annual update from the UK Committee on Climate Change on embedding net zero scrutiny into the work of all committees, as well as considering the implementation of the recommendations from the Presiding Officer's Gender Sensitive Audit.

The Group also agreed to hold the first of its biannual meetings with the new First Minister on 24 May. The session will focus on the Scottish Government's priorities set out by the First Minister to the Parliament.

SPICe

SPICe published a [detailed blog article on the New First Minister's priorities for Scotland](#). The blog summarises the main priorities and commitments

made and provides some analysis of the overall “Missions” and by portfolio. The blog is intended to pick out areas of interest for parliamentary committees and individual MSPs.

The Financial Scrutiny Unit (FSU) in SPICe attended the 15th meeting of the OECD Network of Parliamentary Budget Offices and Independent Fiscal Institutions, in Iceland, from 12-14 April 2022. The network meets annually, hosted by a different member institution each year (and was hosted at the Scottish Parliament in 2017). The meeting involved over 100 delegates from OECD countries.

The meeting involved formal sessions on subjects relating to fiscal oversight and sustainability, including inflationary pressures, government debt, health expenditure and climate change. There were also more practical sessions covering some of the challenges faced by Parliamentary Budget Offices and Independent Fiscal Institutions. Informal networking opportunities also allowed plenty of scope for exploring both the similarities and differences in approaches. Overall, it was a highly productive and relevant meeting, stimulating plenty of opportunities for further conversations both internally and across the network.

During easter recess, staff from the FSU and Data Visualisation Team in SPICe, and the International Relations Office, visited the **Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia in Skopje**. This visit was funded by the [National Democratic Institute](#) and followed up a previous visit by SPICe in 2018 sponsored by the [Westminster Foundation for Democracy](#), to consider and report on financial oversight practices in the Assembly. The 2018 visit resulted in a report recommending the creation of a parliamentary budget office (PBO) based in the Assembly, to help strengthen financial oversight in the North Macedonian Republic.

The PBO in North Macedonia was established in 2020, so this visit was designed to meet the team, and share our experience in the FSU as a fellow Parliamentary Budget Office. We held a number of discussions over the two-day programme, including on how we support committees, MSPs and wider Parliament and lessons learned from our experience. SPICe also presented on how the data visualisation team develops and uses data visualisation in FSU products.

This visit also allowed us to understand the types of meetings that will be most helpful to the North Macedonian PBO when the team visited the Scottish Parliament last week. A programme of meetings, including meetings with senior MSPs, was developed to assist them in determining if the PBO in its current form is meeting the needs of their own Members and officials.

Parliamentary Services

Engagement and Communications

The Participation and Communities Team (PACT) has started to progress work with key external partners to consider how UNCRC can be incorporated in the work of the Scottish Parliament. Focusing initially on children and young people's involvement in committee participation and engagement activities, the Team held a meeting with staff from the following organisations:

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights), Scottish Youth Parliament, The Children's Parliament, Carers Trust, Children and Young People's Centre for Justice, Aberlour Children's Charity, Scottish National Deaf Children's Society, RNIB Scotland, Barnardos Scotland, Sight Scotland, Lickety Spit Theatre Company, Children in Scotland and Who Cares? Scotland.

At this meeting attendees were asked to consider 'What are your ultimate hopes/goals to embed children and young people's rights at the Scottish Parliament?' and provided an opportunity to explore how the Parliament and the organisations can work collaboratively to achieve these aims, sharing good and emerging practice as well as addressing challenges and barriers. This work will continue over the coming months with the next meeting due to take place in June. The team will be exploring ways in which there can be meaningful involvement with children and young people in this work.

Promotion of Gaelic Language Plan

The Gaelic Language Officers and the Parliament Communications Office (PCO) worked together to develop and deliver plans to promote a consultation on the SPCB's draft Gaelic Language Plan. The plans were highly targeted towards those speaking or learning Gaelic and those with an interest in the language. A comprehensive and integrated mix of channels and content was used including website content, social media activity, direct communications to MSPs, newsletter mentions and a podcast recording. All activity was designed to direct people to the GLP consultation on Citizenspace. Our activity resulted in over 100,000 impressions (i.e., people seeing our content), over 700 unique page views for the consultation and 124 consultation responses which, for a niche audience, is very positive.

Lobbying

Since the Lobbying Register was established over 25,000 information returns have been published in its first five years. It is essential that the Register contains a full, accurate and unambiguous record of lobbying and that all submitted information is published, following correct validation.

The SPCB reviews the Lobbying Register Annual Report before publication, each year. SPCB members may recall the latest report set out a number of actions required to improve on the past compliance and response rates of some organisations participating on the Register.

One essential action is for the team to contact the CEO of each of the Register's 1300 active organisations to highlight its compliance performance to date and, where applicable, tackle as an urgency any unresolved actions by that organisation. This process will lead to the publication of some 'older' returns from organisations (including those within falling within the COVID pandemic period). The SPCB and Members should therefore be aware that such returns are now being published as part of this key audit process, and this will be ongoing until all organisations have been contacted and unresolved actions concluded. This has generated some recent [media interest](#).

International Relations

The International Relations Office supported:

- The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) on a visit to the Parliament of North Macedonia
- Presiding Officer and Members at Scotland Week in the USA, as well as the Parliament of Canada and the National Assembly of Quebec
- Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP at a meeting with the Ambassador of Mexico
- Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP at a meeting with the Minister-President of Rhineland-Palatinate
- Members at a British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) Committee meeting in Glasgow
- Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP at a British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) Steering Committee Meeting in Dublin
- Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Members and officials at meetings with the President of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Tasmania
- Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP at a meeting with the Ambassador of Guatemala
- Members at a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Conference in London
- Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP, Members and officials at meetings with the Speaker of the House of Assembly of the Parliament of Tasmania

- Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP, Members and officials at meetings with officials from the Parliamentary Budget Office, Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia
- Presiding Officer at a meeting with the Consul General of China
- Presiding Officer at a meeting with the Consul General of Türkiye
- Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP and Members at a British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) Plenary in Jersey
- Members and officials at meetings with the Senate Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs of the Parliament of the Czech Republic
- Presiding Officer at a meeting with the Palestinian Head of Mission to the UK
- Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officers, Members and officials at meetings with the Speaker of the Parliament of Malawi.

People and Culture

‘Ask People and Culture’ – online drop-in session for MSP staff

At the start of April, the People Services Team (part of the People and Culture Group) ran the first in the new series of ‘Ask P&C’. The online session gave MSP staff a chance to meet with colleagues in the P&C Group and to hear what is available to enable them to fully support their employing MSP. The sessions covered:

- the new [Employee Assistance Programme provider and the additional wellbeing resources that are available](#)
- the current learning and development programme for MSP staff and how to request training, and
- what MSP staff need in order to support their employing MSPs.

The session was well attended (15 staff members) and further sessions are being planned on a regular basis.

Lifestyle Medical Checks

To support our [positive about mental health and wellbeing policy](#), P&C offered medical checks to SPCB staff, MSPs, and their staff. Delivered by our occupational health provider, Optima, the 'Lifestyle Medicals' consisted of a 30-minute health check designed for colleagues to obtain information on their blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose 'numbers'. The appointments were fully booked (with a waiting list) and extra dates were arranged. In total we ran 3 appointment days, with the practitioners seeing 18 people.