COURTS REFORM (SCOTLAND) BILL: FINANCIAL MEMORANDUM

Dear Christine,

Please find attached the Finance Committee’s submission to the Justice Committee on the Courts Reform (Scotland) Bill’s FM.

I also wanted to bring to your attention the difficulties that the Finance Committee has encountered in scrutinising the FM as a result of the truncated timescales for consideration of the Bill at stage 1.

The Finance Committee’s role with regard to FMs is to submit its views to the lead committee to inform the stage 1 report on the Bill. In practice, this means that the Finance Committee’s submission must be made in sufficient time to inform the lead committee’s final evidence session with the member in charge of the Bill.

As you will know, the Bill was introduced on 6 February. Having been advised of the timeframe for your committee to take oral evidence from the member in charge on Tuesday 22 April, the Finance Committee was left with a period of four weeks in which to agree its approach, issue a call for evidence and determine whether there was merit in seeking oral evidence on the FM. After this period, the Committee had two meetings in which to take oral evidence and consider and agree its submission. This resulted in the draft report having to be issued as a late paper and in amendments to it having to be agreed by correspondence.
You may also be aware that the Committee recently submitted written evidence to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee as part of its inquiry into the procedures for considering legislation and that I gave oral evidence on the same subject on Thursday 27 March. Amongst other things, this evidence highlighted the Committee’s concerns in relation to the time allocated for stage 1 inquiries in general and, more specifically, to the time made available for the scrutiny of FMs.

I appreciate the fact that your committee also has a heavy workload and is currently responsible for consideration of several pieces of primary legislation, but I would be grateful if, in future, sufficient time for the Finance Committee’s scrutiny of the FM is taken into account when considering stage 1 timetables.

Yours sincerely,

Kenneth Gibson MSP, Convener