APPC Scotland welcomes the review being undertaken by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, and is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the consultation.

The Role of Cross Party Groups

As the Scottish Parliament website indicates, though Cross-Party Groups are not required to include non-MSP members, they do in practice function to ‘provide an opportunity for MSPs, outside organisations and members of the public to meet and discuss a shared interest in a cause or subject.’

Furthermore, whilst having no powers to formally introduce issues into the Parliamentary or government system, CPGs can function effectively to raise awareness of key issues, facilitate expert discussions, help create political consensus on specific issues, provide information which aids MSPs in the effective scrutiny of legislation, and can inform the development of policy through responses to consultations.

In short, whilst not having any formal status, CPGs may have, or be seen to have, some influence within the Parliament, and it is therefore important that they continue to operate in the same spirit of openness and transparency as do our democratic institutions.

Consultancies and Registration of CPGs

Our response to this consultation is in relation to that aspect of the review which deals with the involvement of consultancies in CPGs. It is therefore particularly focused on Question 7, regarding the provision of information by a consultancy (or charity/not-for-profit organisation) which provides secretariat services to a Cross-Party Group.

Whilst many of our members have clients who are members of CPGs, and consultants often attend meetings of interest, none of our members currently provide secretariat services or have any other formal role in the functioning of CPGs.

Nevertheless, APPC Scotland is in agreement with the proposal that the rules governing CPGs should require any consultancy providing secretariat services to provide its full client list, as this is in keeping with the objective of enhancing openness and transparency.
The APPC has long been committed to these principles, which is why, for 17 years, we have provided a public register of our clients and consultants. APPC’s register is publicly available at www.appc.org.uk.

APPC SCOTLAND
16 APRIL 2012