Further to the call for evidence regarding the elections of the Presiding Officer, I am writing to submit my views on the proposed changes.

1. Should the PO elections continue where possible to take place at the first meeting of the Parliament, after the oath taking, or should there be a gap between the oath taking and the PO elections?

2. Is any change needed to the time period allowed for making nominations?

Yes, there should be a gap between the oath taking and the PO elections and it would be beneficial if the time period allowed for making nominations was changed to reflect potentially new elected members. There should be sufficient time allocated between the oath taking and the elections of PO and DPOs to allow elected members to be briefed on the nomination and election process.

3. Is one nominator and one seconder for PO/DPO candidates sufficient? Should there be any requirement for a seconder from outside the candidate’s own party?

Yes, one nominator and one seconder for PO/DPO candidates are sufficient and it should be a requirement to have a seconder from outside the candidate’s own party.

4. Are additional steps needed to ensure that members, particularly new members, have an informed basis for voting?

There should be an opportunity to allow a hustings event to be held; to allow candidates to make a speech before the elections would be beneficial.

5. Is a quarter of members the right threshold for a valid vote?

Setting a higher threshold for a valid vote would be a welcome change. The threshold could potentially be a third of the members.

6. Is any change needed to the voting provisions?

Allowing new nominations during the voting process would be a welcome change; it might allow more choice with regard to candidates.

7. Do the current provisions relating to political balance provide adequate safeguards?

No, the current provisions do not provide adequate safeguards and current practice of having three officers representing three different parties should become a rule in order to guarantee political balance within the parliamentary system.
8. Are the current requirements sufficient?

The current arrangements are not sufficient and new rules should be implemented which would oblige Deputy Presiding Officers to suspend membership of their political party too, thereby ensuring political neutrality. After all, when in the chair, reference is made that whoever is there is the Presiding Officer.

9. Are there any considerations the Committee should take into account in drawing up the rules for the appointment of additional DPOs?

Any proposal should, where possible, ensure political balance within the Scottish Parliament. This merits consideration and a recommendation for additional DPOs would be welcomed, especially when looking in the current and future parliamentary timetable, and particularly due to cover when the PO or DPOs may be unable to carry out duties due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances.

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