

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Committee reform inquiry

Written submissions received from Scottish Government

Thank you for the invitation to attend the evidence session on 8 October as part of the inquiry into committee reform. I would of course be happy to attend but in the meantime I thought it would be helpful to set out some initial thoughts on the key issues at hand which the Committee may like to address in the preceding sessions.

I should firstly acknowledge the work carried out by the Committee in producing its report on elected conveners. This helped contextualise the debate on wider parliamentary reform and I welcome this follow-up inquiry. It is of course entirely appropriate for the Parliament to periodically review committee structures, working practices and procedures so as to ensure they remain effective, relevant, and fit for purpose.

I would wish to keep the implications of any proposed changes for Government business under careful consideration, and a number of key principles would inform my views on that:

- The desirability of ensuring that parliamentary scrutiny remains sufficiently flexible to enable the Parliament to hold the Government to account in an efficient and effective manner, anticipating the wider range of issues for which the Parliament will shortly become responsible.
- The desirability of ensuring that, while enabling the Parliament to hold the Government to account, parliamentary processes and procedures should not of themselves prevent the timely delivery of the Government's legislative and wider policy programme.
- The potential benefits to be gained in retaining a link between committee remits and Ministerial portfolios, to help ensure the Parliament is able to hold the Government to account across its full range of responsibilities.

In light of the fact that many of the issues raised by the Committee's inquiry relate to the internal operation of the Scottish Parliament it would be my preference to limit the Government's observations at this point to these principles.

However, I look forward to discussing the Committee's inquiry with you further at the 8 October session, and would be happy to provide further written evidence to the Committee later in its inquiry if that would be helpful.

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MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS
21 SEPTEMBER 2015**