Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

3rd Report, 2012 (Session 4)

Annual Report

Published by the Scottish Parliament on 11 June 2012
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Remit and membership

Remit:

1. The remit of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee is to consider and report on—

(a) the practice and procedures of the Parliament in relation to its business;

(b) whether a member's conduct is in accordance with these Rules and any Code of Conduct for members, matters relating to members' interests, and any other matters relating to the conduct of members in carrying out their Parliamentary duties;

(c) the adoption, amendment and application of any Code of Conduct for members; and

(d) matters relating to public appointments in Scotland.

2. Where the Committee considers it appropriate, it may by motion recommend that a member's rights and privileges be withdrawn to such extent and for such period as are specified in the motion.

*(Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament, Rule 6.4)*

Membership:

Margaret Burgess
Bob Doris
Helen Eadie
Alex Fergusson (from 16.11.2011 until 28.03.2012)
John Lamont (from 28.03.2012)
Margaret McCulloch (from 22.12.2011)
Margaret McDougall (until 22.12.2011)
Nanette Milne (until 16.11.2011)
Dave Thompson
Paul Wheelhouse

Committee Clerking Team:

Clerk to the Committee
Alison Walker
Gillian Baxendine

Senior Assistant Clerk
Roz Wheeler
Alastair Macfie

Assistant Clerk
Catherine Fergusson

Support Manager
Sam Currie
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

3rd Report, 2012 (Session 4)

Annual Report

The Committee reports to the Parliament as follows—

1. This report covers the work of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee during the parliamentary year from 11 May 2011 to 10 May 2012.

Inquiries and Reports

2. The Committee has undertaken work across all three elements of its remit —

Reform of parliamentary business: remodelling the parliamentary week

3. The Committee completed its inquiry into reforming parliamentary business in December 2011. This inquiry was to review whether existing Parliamentary practices could be improved to make the Parliamentary proceedings more responsive and topical. The inquiry was also timely due to the likely addition of new powers and responsibilities in the future, including those in the 2012 Scotland Act. Since her appointment the Presiding Officer has sought to generate momentum for change within the bodies crucial to the effective functioning of Parliament and at her request, the Committee considered the structure of the week and of question times. Main recommendations in the report were for the Parliament to meet in plenary session on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and for a new topical question time on Tuesdays.

4. These changes have still to be agreed by the Parliament.

Review of Section 7 of the Code of Conduct

5. The Committee has begun an inquiry to review Section 7 of the Code of Conduct for MSPs to ensure that it remains relevant, appropriate, clear and enforceable. Section 7 contains a wide range of provisions relating to General Conduct in the Chamber and in Committee.

6. The Committee expects to report on the review in autumn 2012.
Review of Cross-Party Groups

7. The focus of the review is how effectively the current rules in relation to CPGs are working and whether any changes could be made to improve the system for registration, operation and regulation of Cross-Party Groups.

8. The Committee recognised the very valuable work that can be undertaken by these groups, allowing for information sharing and collaboration within the policy community and providing MSPs with information that aids them in scrutinising the Scottish Government in committees, in the chamber and through written questions.

9. While recognising this valuable work, the Committee wants to ensure that the system provides openness and transparency for both CPG stakeholders and the wider public. Achieving transparency and effective operation, while not over-regulating CPGs, is the aim of the Committee’s review.

10. The Committee expects to report on the review in autumn 2012.

Commissioners

Public Appointments Commissioner for Scotland

11. In September 2011 and April 2012 the Committee took evidence from the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland on the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland. The Committee also took evidence on the implementation of her equalities strategy – Diversity Delivers – and her report to Parliament on succession planning and reappointments.

12. The Committee received two reports from the Commissioner on breaches of the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland.

Public Standards Commissioner for Scotland

13. In September 2011 the Committee took evidence from the Standards Commissioner on his Annual Report 2010-11 and also discussed with him revised directions from the Committee which were introduced in March 2012.

14. The Committee did not receive any complaint reports from the Public Standards Commissioner this year.

Cross-Party Groups

15. A total of 77 Cross-Party Groups re-registered or were accorded recognition by the Committee in this parliamentary year.

Equal opportunities

16. The Committee contacted a variety of equalities groups to ask for any potential impact its inquiry into Reform of parliamentary business might have on these Groups. The Committee also recommended that the SPCB undertake an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) of any changes agreed by the Parliament.
Meetings

17. The Committee met 16 times during the parliamentary year. Of these meetings, 14 were partly in private. The items considered in private included the Committee’s work programme, consideration of draft Committee reports and approaches to the Committee’s inquiries.
Members who would like a printed copy of this *Numbered Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.