This response is from The British Horse Society Scotland, we have been a member of the cross Party Group for Animal Welfare since its inception.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Question 1: What do you understand the role of CPGs in the Scottish Parliament to be?

To enable organisations and interest groups to bring issues to the attention of MSPs and civil servants and also to allow groups and organisations to discuss matters with like-minded others. CPGs are a forum and the fact that they are held in the Scottish Parliament gives issues gravitas and importance.

Question 2: What benefits does the existence of CPGs bring to non-MSPs in terms of engagement with MSPs and the work of the Scottish Parliament?

CPGs are a good way of finding out how to tackle issues, how to lobby effectively and to form partnerships. They are also good for finding out how the Scottish parliament works and where groups can pull together.

Registration of Cross-Party Groups

Question 3: Do you consider that the Code could be clearer on the process for establishing and registering a Cross-Party Group? If so, please provide comments as to any specific elements of the process that, in your experience, could be improved.

Our animal welfare group has been very well run in a spirit of openness with everyone having a say, we are quite happy with that.

Question 4: The Code of Conduct requires that a Group’s overall membership profile must be “parliamentary in character”. What do you understand the term “parliamentary in character” to mean in the context of Cross-Party Groups and is the minimum requirement of 5 MSP members sufficient to meet this requirement?

I do not know what parliamentary in character means, however our group is well run and properly conducted with excellent minutes, very useful, it is very rare for us to have as many as 5 MSPS present, but that does not deter from the good work we do in progressing concerns,
assisting legislation and forming useful alliances, our group is an excellent forum and probably is very parliamentary in character!

**Question 5**: When applying for recognition, CPG conveners must submit two forms, one of which must be submitted in hard copy. Would it benefit CPGs if the forms were combined and electronic submission was accepted for this single form?

*Probably our convenuer is voluntary so anything that makes less work would be welcome.*

**Question 6**: CPGs are required to register any financial or material support received from a single source in a calendar year which has a total value of more than £500. This £500 threshold is close to the threshold above which individual MSPs are required to register gifts in their Register of Interests. Do you consider that the £500 threshold is appropriate and should be retained?

*Yes £500 seems like a good cut off, any larger than that and the group is possibly becoming too wealthy and you’d need to ask why are they raising money, £500 is a good administrative pot.*

**Question 7**: The Rules on All-Party Groups at Westminster require that, where secretariat services are provided by a consultancy or by a charity/not-for-profit organisation, the relevant organisation must agree to make certain information available on request. The information for a consultancy firm is its full client list and for a charity/not-for profit organisation is a list of any commercial company which has made a donation or donations of more than £5,000 in the twelve months prior to the request being made.

Should a similar requirement be introduced for CPGs?

*Our CPG does not fund raise, I don’t think the financial rule is necessary but the rest on openness is vital, however whenever had an issue our group happily shares all information.*

**Question 8**: Following a general election, CPGs have 90 days within which they can re-register, provided that there is no significant change to the information registered in the previous Session. Due to the changes in MSPs that arise following an election, the process that must be followed for reregistration is largely similar to that for the initial registration of a Group. The Parliamentary timetable also means that the re-registration period carries into the summer recess, during which the election of office bearers cannot be carried out, meaning that CPGs wishing to re-register must arrange and hold their first meetings before the start of the recess.

What are your views on whether—

- the re-registration provision should be retained, and if so
- the re-registration period should exclude days when the Parliament is in recess?
Exclude recess.

**Question 9**: The Code states that “to maintain and guarantee the Parliamentary nature of CPG meetings, at least 2 MSP members of a Group must be present at every meeting”. Is the 2 MSP quorum sufficient to ensure the Parliamentary nature of CPG meetings? Should there be a requirement that the MSPs present should represent more than one of the political parties represented on the Group?

I think 2 is appropriate and it does not really matter what political parties they represent, but then animal welfare is not a party political matter it is a matter of concern to everyone.

**Question 10**: Should CPGs be required to hold a minimum number of meetings per year? If so, what should the minimum number be?

**Three but quarterly is better.**

**Question 11**: All Groups are required to hold an annual general meeting and to elect office bearers every twelve months. As Groups must elect officer bearers for the purpose of both initial registration and re-registration, do you consider that there would be any benefits to introducing a single date by which all Groups must hold their AGM? For example, if the Parliament’s first meeting of a Session was on 11 May, would the 11 May in each successive year be a suitable date by which an AGM must be held?

I don’t think this really matters.

**Question 12**: The Code currently provides that there are limitations on the use of Parliamentary resources to support CPG meetings. What are your views on these limitations?

(Note: this does not apply to CPG events which are subject to the same terms and conditions as any other MSP-sponsored event held under the SPCB events policy.)

**No particular views**

**Question 13**: The Convener of a Group is held primarily responsible for ensuring that the Group operates in compliance with the Code of Conduct and has to sign a declaration to that effect. Do you have any views on whether this should continue or if the provisions should be changed to extend the responsibility to all MSP office bearers of a Group?

**Quite happy for this to remain with convener**

**Question 14**: Groups are required to provide an annual report (submitted within 30 days of their AGM) which includes current membership and membership changes, a financial statement, the number of meetings held and any additional information that the Group wishes to provide. Should Groups
be required to include additional information, such as the topics discussed at each meeting, number of MSP and non-MSP attendees and details of any reports or papers published by the Group?

I am sure annual report is adequate; our minutes are always available for everyone to see anyway.

*Question 15:* At present, the SPPA Committee has not delegated to the Standards clerks any role in ensuring that CPGs are aware of and comply with the key rules relating to the administration of CPGs. What are your views on whether it would be of assistance to CPGs if the Standards clerks were to perform such a role in relation to matters such as the notification of CPG meetings, updates to registration details and deadlines for submission of documentation?

I am sure this suggestion is a good one, makes everything clear.

*Question 16:* Do you have any other comments on the operation of the CPG system in the Scottish Parliament?

No, except that cross party groups are very useful and in our experience a force for good, they become a valuable forum, good for networking and contain a high level of subject expertise.

BRITISH HORSE SOCIETY
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