STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS
COMMITTEE

REVIEW OF CROSS-PARTY GROUPS

WRITTEN SUBMISSION RECEIVED FROM INCLUSION SCOTLAND

Background: Inclusion Scotland (IS) is a Scottish-wide network of disabled people’s organisations which exists to draw attention to the physical, social, economic, cultural and attitudinal barriers that affect disabled people’s everyday lives. Inclusion Scotland is funded primarily by the Scottish Government’s Equalities Unit.

General

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

Inclusion Scotland believes that Cross Party Groups play a vital role in making the Scottish Parliament open and accessible to Civic Scotland. CPGs bring MSPs from all parties into regular contact with NGOs, campaigners and ordinary members of the public who share a common interest in certain issues or sections of Scottish society. They thus contribute to making our democracy more participative and relevant to wider Scottish society. A democracy in which people feel that they can actively participate in, and contribute to, is also a healthier democracy.

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?

Inclusion Scotland believes that the CPGs afford a venue where NGOs and ordinary members of the public can engage in informed, and yet largely informal, discussion with their elected representatives. They thus provide an important opportunity for information sharing and awareness raising where NGOs and others can feel “heard” and where MSPs can learn of rising issues of concern.

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? Etc.

No. None.

Question 4: The Code of Conduct requires that a Group’s overall membership profile must be “parliamentary in character” etc.
Inclusion Scotland thinks that “Parliamentary in character” means dealing with issues and subject matter that are germane to the Parliament and of interest and concern to MSPs. We believe that the minimum requirement of 5 MSPs is sufficient to make the CPGs “Parliamentary in character”.

**Question 5: When applying for recognition etc.**

Yes. One electronic form seems sufficient.

**Question 6: Do you consider that the £500 threshold is appropriate and should be retained? Etc.**

Yes. On the grounds of openness and transparency it is right and proper to know whether or not CPGs are receiving financial assistance from lobby organisations and in turn whether this might be influencing the agenda of meetings etc. The £500 limit seems a sensible compromise figure which acknowledges that financial support may be necessary for CPGs to function properly but does not require small donations to be registered.

**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. Etc.**

Inclusion Scotland believes that this seems a sensible suggestion on the grounds of openness and transparency.

**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. Etc.**

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?

Inclusion Scotland believe that it is probably correct that re-registration of some sort should take place to ensure that CPGs retain the support of five current MSPs after the election. However perhaps all that should be required from CPGs are that the signatures/notification by 5 or more MSPs that they continue, or wish to become, supporters of a particular CPG are provided. If however it is decided to continue with full re-registration the re-registration period should definitely exclude days on which the Parliament is not sitting.

**Operation of Cross-Party Groups**

**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”. Etc.**
Inclusion Scotland believes that the current quorum of two MSPs is sufficient. We do not think that it is necessary to introduce a requirement that the MSPs are of two different parties. It should be sufficient that the MSPs supporting the Cross Party Group need to be drawn from different parties. It would be over-bureaucratic and counter-productive if there was a requirement that MSPs from different parties needed to attend each meeting. For example if three or four MSPs from one party showed up and the illness of an MSP from another party prevented there being the required quorum would it be fair to all of those who had turned up expecting a meeting to take place to tell them that an arbitrary rule prevented it going forward?

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

Yes. At least two. Otherwise it can hardly be said to be a functioning Group.

**Question 11: All Groups are required to hold an annual general meeting and to elect office bearers every twelve months. Etc.**

Inclusion Scotland cannot see any need for this type of rule/requirement. Nor can we see any advantage flowing from it especially if, as suggested above, groups may, in future, not be properly constituted until after the summer recess.

**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? Etc.**

Inclusion Scotland are unsure of what these limitations are and have no strong opinion on this.

**Regulation of Cross-Party Groups**

**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?**

Inclusion Scotland believes that the current arrangements are sufficient.

**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. Etc.**

Inclusion Scotland cannot see any great advantage in placing additional requirements on Cross Party Groups which will require additional bureaucracy.
and administrative time to comply with and therefore may deter MSPs from joining or holding office in CPGs. The only one which might be relevant is providing details of reports or papers published by the group.

**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. Etc.**

Inclusion Scotland has no strong views on this.

**Question 16: Do you have any other comments on the operation of the CPG**

No.

BILL SCOTT
MANAGER
INCLUSION SCOTLAND
1 MARCH 2012