



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

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4 December 2020

Dear Ken,

Commission on Parliamentary Reform recommendations on conveners

I am writing to you in connection with the recommendations on conveners made by the Commission on Parliamentary Reform. You will recall that you wrote to me on 27 July setting out the views of the Reform Group in relation to the recommendation on elected conveners.

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee has deliberated on these recommendations at seven separate meetings since autumn 2018. To inform its discussions, it commissioned SPICe to prepare a briefing paper on the adoption of elected chairs in other legislatures. As there were mixed views on the merits of elected conveners with the Committee, it decided to survey Members to ascertain whether there was widespread support for the proposal.

At its meeting on 29 October, the Committee considered the results of that survey. Only 16 MSPs responded to the survey, which was a lower response rate than that for other recent surveys conducted by the Committee. The views of those surveyed on elected conveners was:

- 3 MSPs supported the election of conveners
- 10 MSPs did not support the election of conveners
- 3 MSP had mixed views or no firm views on the election of conveners

The Committee also sought the view of Members on whether any committees other than the Public Audit and Post-Legislative Scrutiny Committee should be convened by opposition Members. Ten of the 16 members who responded indicated that they supported the continuation of current arrangements.

In relation to the question of whether conveners should be remunerated and/or receive additional resource, the response from Members was more mixed with eight expressing clear support for the remuneration of conveners. However, some other Members highlighted that the volume of work undertaken by a convener might not necessarily be more than that undertaken by a backbencher who was a member of three committees. In addition, the Committee gathered evidence from conveners on their workloads. This provided evidence that some of them undertook considerable extra work as a result of their positions, although this picture was mixed.

In its discussions on the recommendation of the Commission on Parliamentary Reform about elected conveners, the SPPA Committee also noted that the Session 4 SPPA Committee had conducted an inquiry into elected conveners in 2015. This inquiry concluded that instead of introducing elected conveners, there should be a focus on the ability of committees to scrutinise legislation and policy and hold the government account. In a further inquiry into the operation of committees in 2016, the then SPPA Committee was not persuaded that elected conveners would result in more effective committees.

The SPPA Committee therefore concluded that there was insufficient support for elected conveners among members to take forward the recommendation of the Commission on Parliamentary Reform that procedures should be put in place for the election of conveners from the start of next session. However, it did recognise that there was a degree of support for either remunerating conveners and/or providing them with additional resources for their role and concluded that this might be a matter that merited further consideration at the beginning of the next session.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Bill Kidd MSP", with a horizontal line underneath.

Bill Kidd MSP
Convener
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee