

PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU – PORTFOLIO AND GENERAL QUESTIONS

Introduction

1. The Bureau has previously agreed to a schedule for portfolio questions up to the end of June 2021. In doing so, the Bureau also discussed the resumption of General Questions and the inclusion of a portfolio slot for questions to the Deputy First Minister in relation to his Covid-19 Recovery remit.
2. This paper sets out options for consideration by the Bureau in relation to the scheduling of Portfolio and General Questions.

Portfolio Questions

3. There are nine Cabinet Secretary Portfolios, including Covid-19 Recovery. Standing Orders provide that Portfolio Questions shall be a period of up to 40 minutes each week, normally on a Wednesday. The tables below give an option of Portfolios on Wednesday only or on both Wednesday and Thursday.

Option 1

w/c	Portfolio 1 (Wed)	Portfolio 2 (Wed)
30 Aug	Covid 19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business	Net Zero, Energy and Transport
6 Sept	Rural Affairs and Islands	Health and Social Care
13 Sept	Social Justice, Housing and Local Government	Constitution, External Affairs and Culture
20 Sept	Justice and the Law Officers	Finance and Economy
27 Sept	Education and Skills	Covid 19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business
4 Oct	Net Zero, Energy and Transport	Rural Affairs and Islands

Option 2

w/c	Portfolio 1 (Wed)	Portfolio 2 (Wed)	Portfolio 3 (Thurs)
30 Aug	Covid 19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business	Net Zero, Energy and Transport	Rural Affairs and Islands
6 Sept	Health and Social Care	Social Justice, Housing and Local Government	Constitution, External Affairs and Culture
13 Sept	Justice and the Law Officers	Finance and Economy	Education and Skills
20 Sept	Covid 19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business	Net Zero, Energy and Transport	Rural Affairs and Islands
27 Sept	Health and Social Care	Social Justice, Housing and Local Government	Constitution, External Affairs and Culture
4 Oct	Justice and the Law Officers	Finance and Economy	Education and Skills

4. In relation to the inclusion of a Covid 19 Recovery portfolio, Business Managers are invited to consider whether questions relating to the non-Covid elements of the Deputy First Minister's responsibilities should be 'mapped' to other portfolios in the way that they have been for committees. This would mean, for example, that a portfolio question relating to local governance review and democratic renewal could be accepted by the Chamber Desk for the Social Justice, Housing and Local Government portfolio, but not for the Covid-19 portfolio.
5. In their initial discussion on oral questions in the Chamber, Business Managers had noted that in lieu of a specific portfolios slot for Covid 19 Recovery, a resumption of General Questions could provide an alternative means of raising questions on issues within the Deputy First Minister's responsibilities. The Bureau may wish to consider whether, in light of the inclusion of a Covid 19 Recovery portfolio, whether or not it is necessary to resume General Questions.

General Questions

6. Standing Orders provide that General Questions shall be a period of up to 20 minutes each week, normally on a Thursday. Business Managers will be aware the General Questions must not relate to the portfolios taken at Portfolio Questions in the same week.
7. Prior to the changes to the Parliamentary week introduced in light of Covid-19, General Questions was scheduled at 11.40 on a Thursday morning. As Business Managers will be aware, this scheduling impacted on committees with meeting slots on a Thursday morning as it necessitated them concluding their meetings by no later than 11.30. Scheduling General Questions at a different point would therefore provide around an additional 20 minutes of meeting time for Thursday morning committees.
8. Subject to discussion of the cycle for Portfolio Questions, the Bureau may wish to consider whether or not it wishes to resume scheduling General Questions and, if so, at what time. Subject to consideration of the cycle of Portfolio Questions, one option may be for General Questions be scheduled at 2.30 on Thursdays.

Recommendation

9. The Bureau is invited to consider the cycle of Portfolio Questions and the scheduling of General Questions.

**Parliamentary Business Team
June 2021**