

Parliamentary Bureau – Business in the Chamber

Introduction

1. This paper sets out various items of business that require to be scheduled in the business programme over the next parliamentary year.

Non-Government Business

2. Under Rule 5.6.1(b) of Standing Orders, the Bureau is required to set aside 16 half sitting days in each parliamentary year to consider business chosen by parties that are not represented in the Government. It has been the practice of the Bureau to use proportionality to allocate those half sitting days amongst the non-Government parties. This convention would provide the following results for Session 7:

Party	Proportion of non-Government seats	Share of non-Government business
Labour	23.94%	3.83
Reform UK	23.94%	3.83
Green	21.13%	3.38
Conservative	16.90%	2.70
Liberal Democrat	14.08%	2.25

3. The allocation of 16 half days to opposition business is a minimum requirement set out in Standing Orders. There is, however, nothing to prevent the Bureau from agreeing to additional allocations from the time not set aside by the Rules.

Decision

4. **The Bureau is invited to consider and agree the allocation of non-Government business to the end of the Parliamentary year.**

Committee Business

5. Rule 5.6.1(a) requires the Bureau to give priority to committee business on 12 half sitting days in the parliamentary year. In Session 6, the Committee Office, on behalf of the Conveners Group, co-ordinated requests for committee business with the Scottish Government with suggested debate slots then agreed by the Bureau via the business programme.

People's Panel Reports

6. At the end of Session 6, the Parliament agreed that Standing Orders be revised to provide for priority to be given to debate a report of a People's Panel on 2 half sitting days per year.

7. It is proposed that the Committee Office co-ordinate requests for People's Panel debates on behalf of the Conveners' Group with the Scottish Government. The Conveners' Group will consider bids from committees and make the final decision on selection. These slots would then be agreed by the Bureau via the business programme.

Members' Business

Criteria for selection

8. Guidance in relation to the timing and content of motions for Members' business was most recently reviewed and agreed by the Bureau in March 2015.
9. The guidance contains the following criteria at paragraph 4.2, which has been used by the Bureau to select motions for Members' business—

4.2 Members' Business Motions

The Parliamentary Bureau selects motions for Members' Business debate using the following criteria, on which Chamber Desk clerks can advise—

Motions—

- (a) must be explicitly of only local or regional relevance; or
- (b) must raise issues of policy in a local or regional context and have cross-party support*; or
- (c) must raise issue-commemorating anniversaries or mark national "weeks" or special events and have cross-party support; and
- (d) must not "call on" anyone or any organisation to do anything, which includes taking or reversing decisions. This means avoiding the use of calls on, urges, encourages, asks etc and even should and hopes in cases in which it is clear who or what organisation is expected to take action.

For (a) and (b) above, the motion must contain an explicit local or regional reference in Scotland.

*Cross-party support means (as of 3 October 2014) that Members' Business motions require the support of three parties or groupings represented on the Parliamentary Bureau.

10. Members may wish to note that the Bureau may exceptionally select for debate a motion which falls outwith the above criteria as long as the motion has cross-party support.
11. The Presiding Officer indicated to Bureau members that he considers that cross-party support should mean that Members' business motions require the support of at least one additional party represented on the Parliamentary Bureau. This means that the definition of cross-party support in the Guidance would become the following:

*Cross-party support means (as of 26 May 2026) that Members' Business motions require the support of two parties or groupings represented on the Parliamentary Bureau.

Decision

- 12. The Bureau is asked to consider and endorse the criteria for selection of motions for Members' business and to note the Presiding Officer's position on the application of cross-party support this Session.**

Timing

13. Standing Orders require that a period of up to 45 minutes is set aside at each meeting of the Parliament for Members' Business. In session 6, three Members Business Debates were scheduled each week (on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday lunchtime following FMQs). The Presiding Officer has indicated that his preference is now for Members' Business to take place following Decision Time on Thursdays,
14. Previous practice has been for the Bureau to select motions for debate from those admissible motions agreed by the Monday of the week preceding the debate. This timetable would allow the Bureau to begin scheduling Members' business debates during the week beginning 8 June from relevant motions lodged by 1 June.

Allocation

15. In previous years, Members' business debates have been allocated using the d'Hondt formula and it has been the practice to follow 30 calculations of d'Hondt before returning to the start again. This pattern would give the following result for Session 7:

	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Week 1	SNP	SNP	SNP
Week 2	LAB or REF	LAB or REF	GREEN
Week 3	SNP	CON	SNP
Week 4	LD	SNP	LAB or REF
Week 5	LAB or REF	SNP	GREEN
Week 6	SNP	SNP	CON
Week 7	SNP	LAB or REF	LAB or REF
Week 8	SNP	GREEN or LD	GREEN or LD
Week 9	SNP	SNP	LAB or REF

Week 10	LAB or REF	SNP	CON
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16. Business Managers will note that this allocation results in a number of weeks where there are ties. Business Managers may wish to agree the mechanism by which these ties are to be resolved.

Decision

17. **The Bureau is invited to consider and agree its approach to the allocation of Members' business debates.**

Questions

18. Standing Orders makes provision for a number of different oral question times to be included in the business programme. These question times, and the days on which they have normally been scheduled are as follows:

- Topical Questions on Tuesdays
- Portfolio Questions on Wednesdays and Thursday (scheduling will be subject to confirmation of a rota)
- First Minister's Questions (FMQs) on Thursdays
- General Questions to be held on Thursdays.

Portfolio and General Questions

19. The scheduling of Portfolio and General Questions requires consideration of the lead-in times for submitting names and lodging questions. For the two proposed Portfolio Questions to be held on a Wednesday, names for selection would need to be submitted by 12 noon on the Monday of the week preceding. Members drawn for selection would then have until noon on the Wednesday of the preceding week to submit their question.

20. In addition, for a date for Portfolio Questions to be set, a rota of the Cabinet Secretary portfolios would need to be approved by the Bureau and incorporated in the business programme. A proposal is provided at Annexe A.

21. Ministerial appointments took place on 20 May. The earliest date on which Portfolio Questions could be held is on **Wednesday 9 June** as names would need to be provided for the draw by 12 noon on Monday 1 June and questions by 12 noon on Wednesday 3 June.

22. For General Questions to be scheduled for Tuesday 2 June and Thursday 4 June, names have been requested to be submitted for the draw by 9:30 on Tuesday 26 May and questions by 12 noon on Wednesday 27 May. This takes into account the closure of the Office of the Clerk on Friday 22 May and Monday 25 May.

Decision

23. **The Bureau is invited to note these dates in relation to the commencement of General Questions in the first week of June and Portfolio Questions in the second week of June.**
24. **The Bureau is invited to consider the proposed cycle for Portfolio Questions in Annexe A in order to allow the relevant portfolio question times to be included in the business programme.**

Parliamentary Business Team
May 2026

Annexe A

	Portfolio 1 (Wed)	Portfolio 2 (Wed)
Week 1	Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Finance and Local Government, Parliamentary Business and Veterans	Public Service Reform, Europe, External Affairs and Energy
Week 2	Justice	Health and Care
Week 3	Climate Action and Rural Affairs	Education, Culture and Gaelic
Week 4	Social Justice and Housing	Economy, Tourism and Transport