

# Parliamentary Bureau – Potential temporary amendments to standing orders

## Introduction

1. Rule 17.2.1(b) allows the Parliament to agree to suspend and vary Standing Orders, for the purpose of specific items of business, on a motion of Parliamentary Bureau.

## Requirement for the temporary amendment of Standing Orders in relation to parliamentary questions and Decision Times

2. The Presiding Officer has set out his proposals for the parliamentary week to the Parliament. This includes the following:
  - having a First Minister's Question Time Session for general and constituency questions for 30 minutes on Tuesdays (from 14:30-15:00) and a First Minister's Question Time Session for Party Leaders on Thursdays (from 14:00-14:30).
  - two portfolio question times will take place on Wednesday for 30 minutes each (from 14:00-15:00) with the addition of a facility for Members drawn in the various ballots for oral questions in any given week to agree to swap their allocated questions.
  - Two general question times will take place on Tuesday for 25 minutes from 14:05-14:30 and on Thursday for 30 minutes from 13:30.
3. The Presiding Officer has also indicated that he intends that Decision Time will move to 17:30 on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and that Thursday's Members' Business will take place after the conclusion of Decision Time. Decision time that day is to remain at 17:00.

## Discussion

4. The following draft motions have been prepared to make the necessary suspensions and variations to the relevant rules.

### **Motion 1**

That the Parliament agrees, under Rule 17.2.1(b), to suspend and vary Rule 13.6 as follows, for the purpose of First Minister's Question Time on Thursday 28 May 2026—

- (a) in paragraph A1, the words "may be lodged in writing in advance, or" are suspended, and for the word "1" there is substituted the word "3"
- (b) in Rule 13.6, paragraphs 1 and 2 are suspended
- (c) in paragraph 3, the words "In addition to questions selected in advance under paragraph

(d) in paragraph 4, the words “so long as that question is not one which has been selected in advance” are suspended.

## Motion 2

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) under Rule 17.2.1(b) to suspend and vary standing orders as follows for the purpose of plenary debates and Decision Time—

(i) in Rule 2.2.3, for “09:15 and 17:30 on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday” substitute “09:15 and 18:00 on Tuesday and Wednesday, 09:15 and 17.30 on Thursday”

(ii) in Rule 2.2.5, for paragraphs (a) and (b) substitute:

“(a) 17:30 on Monday or Thursday;

(b) 18:00 on Tuesday;

(ba) 18:00 on Wednesday where the Parliament has not taken a decision under paragraph 4;”

(iii) in Rule 11.2.2, for “17:00” substitute “such time between 17:00 and 18:00 as the Presiding Officer may specify”;

(b) under Rule 17.2.1(b) to suspend and vary standing orders as follows for the purpose of Oral Question Times—

(i) for Rule 13.3.2 substitute:

“2. Questions (other than First Minister’s Questions) shall be in writing and lodged with the Clerk.”

(ii) after Rule 13.3.3, insert:

“3A. Paragraph 3 (other than sub-paragraph (d)) applies to a First Minister’s Question as it applies to a question lodged under paragraph 2.”

(iii) in Rule 13.3.4, delete “at First Minister’s Question Time (“a First Minister’s Question”),”

(iv) for Rule 13.6, substitute:

### “Rule 13.6 First Minister’s Questions

1. The Presiding Officer may, call any of the following members to ask a question or questions during First Minister’s Question Time:

(a) the leader of a political party represented by 5 or more members of the Parliament, or a representative of that leader (“a party leader”);

(b) a representative of any group formed in accordance with Rule 5.2.2 (“a group representative”).

(c) a member who is not a member of the Scottish Government or junior Scottish Minister and who is not a party leader or group representative (“a backbencher”).

2. At the first First Minister’s Question Time in each week, the Presiding Officer shall normally call only backbenchers to ask questions, and at the second such Question Time in each week, the Presiding Officer shall normally call only party leaders or group representatives to ask questions.

3. The requirements of these Rules, so far as they relate to questions being in writing and so far as they provide for lodging requirements, do not apply to First Minister’s Questions.”

(v) in Rule 13.6A, insert after paragraph 3:

“3A. After members have been notified that they have been selected and before the deadline for lodging questions under paragraph 4, members whose names are included in those selections may arrange with other such members to swap places, and notify the Clerk accordingly. The Clerk shall ensure that information about any such swaps is published alongside the information notified to members under paragraph 5.”

(vi) Rule 13.6B is suspended

(vii) for Rule 13.7.A1, substitute:

“A1. First Minister’s Question Time shall be a period of up to 30 minutes, normally each Tuesday, and another period of up to 30 minutes, normally each Thursday. General Question Time shall be a period of up to 25 minutes, normally each Tuesday, and another period of up to 30 minutes, normally each Thursday. Portfolio Question Time shall be a period of up to 60 minutes, normally each Wednesday.”

(viii) in Rule 13.7.1, for the words “selected for answer” substitute “asked”

(ix) in Rule 13.7. 9 paragraph (a) is suspended.

(c) that the suspensions and variations of Rules set out in paragraphs (a) and (b) of this motion shall have effect from 29 May 2026 and remain in effect until 31 January

2027 or such earlier date as the Parliament may decide, on a motion by the committee established under Rule 6.4.

## **Recommendation**

Business Managers are invited to consider recommending the motion to suspend and vary the Standing Orders as set out above. If the Bureau is agreed, it is proposed that a Bureau motion be lodged to be taken on Tuesday/Wednesday at Decision Time.

It is proposed that the duration of this rule be until 31 January 2027 and that the Bureau writes to the SPPA Committee to invite it to recommend permanent rule changes to the rules on parliamentary questions in due course.

Parliamentary Business Team

May 2026