Parliamentary Bureau – Request to appoint adviser

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Background

1. The Bureau initially considered the Finance and Public Administration Committee's request to appoint an adviser at its meeting on 27 October 2026. This paper provides additional information in relation to Rule 12.7.

2. The Finance and Public Administration Committee agreed at its meeting on 30 September 2026 to seek the Parliamentary Bureau's approval to appoint a budget adviser, under Rule 12.7 of Standing Orders. The Committee agreed its preferred candidate for the post at its meeting on 7 October 2026, subject to approval from the Bureau and SPCB.

3. Rule 12.7 of Standing Orders enables committees to appoint advisers to assist with scrutiny:

   Rule 12.7 Advisers

   1. A committee may, with the approval of the Parliamentary Bureau, issue directions to the Parliamentary corporation in connection with the appointment by the Parliamentary corporation of any person to inquire into and advise the committee or any sub-committee upon any competent matter. Different advisers may be appointed for different competent matters.

4. Both the decision to seek to appoint an adviser and the decision on the preferred candidate to be an adviser is a matter for the committee to decide. Committees have typically appointed advisers to advise on complex or technical matters to assist with the Committee's scrutiny and the appointment of a budget adviser by the Finance and Public Administration Committee has been a key part of its approach to scrutinising the Scottish Budget in each session of the Parliament.

5. While it has historically been the practice for individual persons to be appointed to support a committee, it has also been the case that the contract has been with a body/legal person as a university for the provision of the services by the adviser.

6. This paper sets out details of the specification and main duties involved in the role and invites the Bureau to approve the Committee's request to appoint a budget adviser

Appointment of adviser

7. The role of the adviser is to provide expert, technical advice to support the Committee in delivering its work programme. Key elements of this will include supporting pre-budget and budget scrutiny and in particular analysis of the relative performance of the UK and Scottish economies as they relate to the operation of the Fiscal Framework and the implications for Scotland's public finances.

8. Previous finance committees have appointed budget advisers for the entirety of a parliamentary session, who have proved valuable in supporting their annual scrutiny of the Scottish Budget, how the UK Budget impacts on Scotland, in-year budget revisions, and the operation of the Fiscal Framework. This work is expected to be even more important this session to advise and support the Committee's input to the forthcoming review of the Fiscal Framework which the Scottish and UK governments have agreed should conclude in 2028.

9. Providing support to the Committee to conduct its scrutiny of the Scottish Fiscal Commission's annual fiscal sustainability reports, as well as the Scottish Government's medium- and longer-term financial plans would also be expected in this role.

10. Ideally, the budget adviser would have been in place in early September 2026 to support the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny, however, this was not possible as no candidates originally applied. The Committee therefore agreed an extension to the deadline for applications and has now agreed its preferred candidate, subject to approval of the Bureau and SPCB. The preferred candidate is on this occasion a highly respected Scottish economic institute rather than one individual, which enables the Committee to draw on a wider range of expertise and allow the time commitment to be spread across a larger group of people.

11. It is hoped that the adviser could now be in place in time to support the Committee's scrutiny of the UK Autumn Budget 2026 and its implications for Scotland, and of the Scottish Budget in December 2026 and January 2027.

12. The Committee has agreed the adviser specification set out below.

Main duties

The main duties of the adviser are to provide expert analysis on—

- Scottish Government budget documents,
- the operation of Scotland's Fiscal Framework, including how block grant adjustments and reconciliations are applied.
- Scottish Fiscal Commission fiscal and economic forecasts,
- the Scottish Government's annual Medium-Term Financial Strategy, and other medium and longer-term planning documents, such as Scottish Spending Reviews,
- the implications for Scotland of UK Budgets and Spending Reviews,
- any relevant primary and secondary legislation including in-year budget revisions,
- any improvements to the budget process,
- any other issues which the Committee may wish to consider in relation to its scrutiny of budgetary and fiscal matters; and
- to provide further briefing materials as requested by the Committee.

In doing so, the adviser would work closely with the Committee clerks and the Financial Scrutiny Unit in SPICe.

Person specification

Skills/abilities – The adviser must have proven analytical skills, particularly in relation to budgetary and tax-related matters including forecasting. Excellent communication skills, both oral and written, and an ability to distil technical or complex issues are essential.

Experience – The adviser will have considerable experience of matters relating to public finance, ideally with a particular focus on the UK and Scottish economic performance as they relate to the operation of the fiscal framework. Experience of working with politicians and committees would be a distinct advantage.

Knowledge – An in-depth knowledge of the Scottish budgetary process and the financial implications of the fiscal framework is crucial. As well as knowledge of the powers and procedures of the Scottish Parliament, the adviser will be able to demonstrate a good understanding of the role, remit and ongoing work of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

Time commitment and availability

Due to the nature of parliamentary business, the adviser will, at times, be required to produce high-quality work to tight deadlines. Proven ability in this area is therefore considered to be essential.

It is anticipated that the adviser's role would involve on average up to four working days' work per month, although this work is expected to be concentrated around key times in the Scottish budget process rather than spread equally across the year.

Contract duration

The contract would initially be from 4 November 2026 until 3 November 2028, with the option for renewal at the end of this period.

Decision

13. The Bureau is invited to approve the appointment of a budget adviser to assist with the FPA Committee's financial scrutiny throughout the session.

Finance and Public Administration Committee
October 2026