



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Conveners Group

Agenda

2nd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6) Wednesday 20 March 2024

The group will meet at 12.45pm in Committee Room 3.

1. **Minutes**
2. **Conveners Group strategic priority – Net Zero Scrutiny:** The Group will receive an update on progress being made in taking forward the Group's agreed actions as part of its strategic priority on net zero scrutiny.
3. **Reporting arrangements:** The Group will consider ways to strengthen understanding of the Parliament's scrutiny role by enhancing existing reporting mechanisms.
4. **Transparency of financial interests of those providing evidence to committees –** The Group will consider correspondence from the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee which relates to the transparency of the financial interests of those providing evidence to committees.

CG/S6/24/2/A

The papers for this meeting are as follows –

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|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Minutes of last meeting | CG/S6/24/1/M(P) |
| 2. Net Zero update | CG/S6/24/1/1 |
| 3. Reporting arrangements | CG/S6/24/1/2 |
| 4. Transparency of financial interest | CG/S6/24/1/3 |

Committee debates this Parliamentary year

1	21/09/2023	Criminal Justice Committee	Tackling online child abuse, grooming and exploitation
2	26/10/2023	Citizen Participation & Public Petitions Committee	Embedding Public Participation in the work of the Parliament
3	7/11/2023	Net Zero, Energy & Transport Committee	A Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland
4	16/11/2023	Constitution, Europe, External Affairs & Culture Committee	Culture in Communities: The challenges and opportunities in delivering a place based approach
5	28/11/2023	Health, Social Care & Sport Committee	Female participation in sport and physical activity
6	12/12/2023	Equalities, Human Rights & Civil Justice Committee	Asylum Seekers in Scotland
7	09/01/2023	Constitution, Europe, External Affairs & Culture Committee	How is Devolution Changing Post-EU
8	14/03/2024	Social Justice and Social Security Committee	Addressing Child Poverty through parental employment
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Contact details for the clerk

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Conveners Group
Wednesday 20 March 2024
2nd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Progress Report on CG Session 6 Strategic Priority: net zero scrutiny

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Conveners Group on progress being made in taking forward the Group's agreed actions as part of its strategic priority on net zero scrutiny. A previous update was provided on 21 June 2023 and this paper focuses on progress since. Further updates will be provided at a future meeting.

Context

2. Climate change (the issue) and net-zero (a policy response) are complex scientific, socio-economic and environmental issues, and so require whole-society consideration. How to approach these issues from the perspective of parliamentary committees was the subject of Conveners Group (CG) discussion in [April 2022](#), and then in [June 2022](#) the Conveners Group agreed seven initial actions. These, and an update on progress since June 2023, are detailed in Table One below.
3. These actions were agreed in the context that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee (NZET) Committee plays a leading role, but also supports other committees in effectively embedding climate scrutiny in their own work.
4. The Scottish Parliamentary Service (SPS) is tasked with supporting delivery of these actions, in the context of wider support for MSPs, their staff and staff of the parliament. This helps the Parliament meet its own statutory public duties on climate change and sustainable development.
5. Progress in delivering this work is the subject of a recent SPICe Spotlight blog [Delivering a model for parliamentary scrutiny of climate change: drivers, actions and next steps](#).

Update on Conveners Group Agreements

Table One – Update on Conveners Group Agreed Actions from June 2023 to March 2024

	Action	Update
1	UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) to be invited to the Conveners Group on annual basis	Chris Stark, Chief Executive, presented to the NZET Committee Business Planning Day in September 2023 and to the CG in October 2023. Chris Stark is stepping down in April 2024 and SPS staff are arranging a visit to the CCC offices to discuss further avenues for collaboration in the next quarter.
2	Commission research on climate change and net zero related to committee remits (mix of SPICe, commissioned, adviser)	SPICe published a hub blog in January 2024 on Climate change and Scottish Parliament committees . This includes 3 blogs to date: Climate change and the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee – Climate policy governance , Climate change and the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee – Sectors , Climate change and the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee . These were published by Dr Dan Barlow, acting as a consultant. Two further blogs are underway by SPICe researchers, on the Economy and Fair Work Committee and the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. The new Knowledge Exchange Manager in Climate Change Scrutiny (see paragraph 11) is currently exploring different ways of producing further research to support diverse academic engagement and effective scrutiny. Support has been offered to all committees to discuss the Conveners Group priority and to support discussion on approaches to scrutiny of net zero.
3	Ask Scottish Government for emissions data by committee portfolio	Previous discussions between Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government officials reflected SG correspondence to the CG that additional analysis would be for the parliament to carry out. SPICe has since undertaken assessments and discussions with the new statistician in SPICe. This indicates that the vast majority of emissions are associated with the portfolios of 4 Committees (NZET, LGHP, RAI and EFW). Emissions data from existing official

		<p>statistics from the Scottish Government can be broadly mapped against the remit for these 4 Committees. Following discussions between clerks and SPICe, officials suggest that this aspect of work be progressed as part of the commissioned research (item 2 in the table). This includes detailing emissions data in the blogs on climate change and net zero related to committee remits, and using narrative and available data to indicate the relevance of net zero to portfolio areas where emissions are not substantive. At the same time, officials will continue to explore other options with potential external partners.</p>
4	Consider ways to strengthen parliamentary processes	<p>There was an exchange of correspondence between CG and SPPA Committee in 2023, with an initial suggestion of amending Standing Orders to require the Scottish Government to provide information necessary to support commitments to deliver against climate change challenges and net zero targets in certain situations (e.g., when lodging a Bill). The SPPA Committee wrote to the NZET Committee asking for its views. As the NZET Committee had not yet considered any primary legislation, it decided to use the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill as a test case. (Stage 1 of the Bill has taken longer than originally anticipated, unfortunately delaying progress.) To complement this work, and ensure a broader base of analysis, clerks and SPICe also undertook desk-based research, considering the quality of information on net zero currently being provided in Policy Memoranda, in five Scottish Government Bills introduced over the past 8 years. This work is now almost complete: NZET will respond to SPPA shortly, with a fuller update provided to CG soon.</p>
5	Climate change / net zero adviser as shared committee resource	<p>Dr Dan Barlow stepped down as Climate Change/ Net Zero adviser in October 2023, in order to take up his new role in the Parliament as Knowledge Exchange Manager – Climate Change Manager, see paragraph 11. In his role as adviser, he supported NZETs work programme and approach to its business planning day in September, as well as providing substantive support to the Public Audit Committee and the Economy and Fair Work Committee. He also worked with SPICe researchers to provide a private briefing to all</p>

		committees on the CCP. A new adviser, Dr Kirsten Jenkins, was recruited in January 2024. She is available, alongside SPICe, to talk to individual conveners or committees at any point. Committee clerks were updated on the resource and support available from Kirsten, Dan and others at a staff meeting in March 2024. The adviser will be working with SPICe and NZET to develop a strategic approach to scrutiny of the Climate Change Plan (CCP).
6	Continued rollout of Sustainable Development Impact Assessment Tool	We are not aware of any committees that have used the SDIA Tool since the last update to CG in June 2023; however, it has been suggested for use in approach papers. It continues to be used routinely in the Non-Government Bills Unit (NGBU). Scottish Parliament staff also hosted and facilitated a workshop on its use for Scottish Government officials in October 2023. Some issues to its wider roll out in scrutiny have been identified through feedback from colleagues, including awareness, relevance and access to facilitators. In response, committee clerking staff were reminded in March 2024 that this facilitated tool remains available for use by committees in considering holistic approaches to legislation or inquiry work. Work is underway to consider other approaches, including a workshop with clerks to demonstrate its use, a shortened or more visual version of the Tool, case studies of its use, and training a wider pool of facilitators. Officials at the House of Commons are considering ways to support sustainable development scrutiny and staff at the Scottish Parliament are sharing learnings about the use of the Tool.
7	Capacity building for MSPs, their staff and staff of the Parliament	Work to date has included delivering a tailored workshop for SPS staff and MSP staff on using IPCC reports for scrutiny with the Thematic Research Lead in Climate and Environment for UK Parliament. We have also enabled access for SPS staff to hybrid CPD opportunities undertaken by the Climate and Environment Policy Hub in the House of Commons (for example, on the Climate Change Committee reports and on Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms). We have continued to promote the Royal Scottish Geographical Society Climate Solutions course to MSPs, their staff and staff of the Parliament. An update on progress in

		identifying and developing CPD on net zero scrutiny was provided to CG for the paper on Supporting Members as Parliamentarians: Continuous Professional Development for Members in January 2024.
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For decision

Whilst a detailed update on CPD will be brought back to the Group in June as part of a wider discussion on CPD, the Conveners Group is asked to take an early view on the following options due to the time required to set them up.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

6. [Professor Jim Skea CBE FRSE FEI HonFSE](#), has recently been appointed as the Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) - the UN body responsible for assessing the science related to climate change, its impacts and future risks and options for adaptation. Professor Skea is also a professor of Sustainable Energy at Imperial College London and was one of the founding members of the Climate Change Committee. He is one of the world's leading authorities on climate change and is highly familiar with the Scottish policy landscape and has been at the forefront of work to embed justice into climate action in Scotland.
7. Professor Skea has indicated that he is willing to meet with MSPs to discuss the work of the IPCC and climate change. One option is to arrange a meeting for CG with Professor Skea, as part of a future CG meeting, or as an informal discussion.

Climate solutions workshop

8. As part of a mapping exercise to identify existing external training on climate change that may be relevant to scrutiny, a global climate solutions workshop was identified as an option for Conveners Group.
9. This is an externally developed 60-minute global climate solutions workshop, run by a trained facilitator. This workshop has been developed to provide policy makers with the ability to test and explore cross-sector climate solutions and visualise how solutions are interconnected.

Conveners are invited to offer views on:

- **Whether they would like to hear from Professor Skea.**
- **Whether any conveners would be interested in taking part in a global climate solutions workshop. This could be delivered to a committee, or to a small number of members across committees.**

Approaches taken by committees to scrutinise climate change and net zero in response to the CG strategic priority

22. While NZET Committee has a lead responsibility here, CG has recognised the cross-cutting nature of net zero scrutiny and that it engages the remits of all parliamentary committees. The overarching objective of this workstream is to find ways to embed net zero scrutiny within the work of all committees.
23. In June 2023, we provided an overview of what climate change and net zero scrutiny committees had undertaken since the start of the session, in response to the CG strategic priority. This demonstrated that thirteen committees out of sixteen (now fifteen following the winding up of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee in June 2023) had undertaken relevant work. Many committees noted that they intended to continue this work or to increase focus on it.
24. This engagement across committees was again clearly demonstrated in the CG meeting with the Climate Change Committee in October 2023.
25. SPICe staff have identified several key policy areas related to climate change and net zero where cross-committee scrutiny could be beneficial:
 - The forthcoming draft Climate Change Plan (CCP), which will set out the Scottish Government's pathway to the targets set by the Climate Change Act 2019
 - Scotland's approach to adapting to climate change, following the recent publication of the draft Scottish National Adaptation Programme
 - The development of Just Transition Plans across a number of sectors and economic regions, and
 - The integration of climate considerations into scrutiny of the Scottish Budget and infrastructure investment decisions.

Conveners Group are reminded of the enhanced resource available to support committees embed consideration of climate change and net zero into their scrutiny work.

Conveners are invited to offer views on:

Whether there are specific cross-cutting areas that they would like officials to focus scrutiny support on. We would also be grateful if any conveners would like to volunteer to consider how the resource can be used to integrate climate change and net zero in their upcoming scrutiny work, for example, through support in upcoming Business Planning Days and Work Programme discussions.

Conveners are encouraged to contact the Senior Analyst in Climate Change Scrutiny, Dr Abbi Hobbs, on abbi.hobbs@parliament.scot or 0131 348 5251 as a first point of contact to discuss support available.

Forward Look

26. The next 3 months will see continued work to deliver the Conveners Group agreed actions and to build the wider model for parliamentary scrutiny, including:
- Specific support to the NZET committee in advance of the draft CCP, to facilitate NZET taking a leading role in coordinating scrutiny across committees. This includes delivering a framework of support available to all committees to support their engagement with the CCP.
 - Continuing to provide support to deal with reactive and ad-hoc approaches from MSPs, committee clerks and others to support their approach to climate scrutiny.
 - Targeted work to embed innovative approaches to enhance engagement with research evidence and expertise on CC and to enable and enhance CC knowledge exchange between Parliament and a more diverse research community.
 - Supporting the Scottish Parliament to collaborate more strategically with public and charitable sector research funders and HEIs in the area of climate change, including working with the SPICe academic engagement team to develop and refine guidance, resources and training for researchers on engaging with the Scottish Parliament and other legislatures.
 - Further developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks, drawing on best practice for knowledge exchange work on climate change in the Scottish Parliament.
 - Further activities to raise awareness of relevance of CC and embed engagement with it across parliamentary work, including through SPICe input to the revision of the Clerking Manual and SPICe quarterlies.
 - Continuing to share learning with other legislatures in the UK and globally on these issues, including continuing collaborations with the Climate Change Thematic Research Lead employed at the UK Parliament.

Summary of recommendations

Conveners are invited to offer views on:

- Whether they would like to hear from Professor Skea, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- Whether any conveners would be interested in taking part in a global climate solutions workshop. This could be delivered to a committee, or to a small number of members across committees.
- Whether there are specific cross-cutting areas that they would like officials to focus scrutiny support on. We would also be grateful if any conveners would like to volunteer to consider how the resource can be used to integrate climate change and net zero in their upcoming scrutiny work, for example, through support in upcoming Business Planning Days and Work Programme discussions.
- Conveners Group are also reminded of the enhanced resource available to support committees embed consideration of climate change and net zero into their scrutiny work.

Conveners Group Clerking Team
March 2024

Conveners Group
Wednesday 20 March 2024
2nd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Conveners Group: reporting arrangements

Introduction

1. This paper invites the Conveners Group to consider ways to strengthen understanding of the Parliament's scrutiny role by enhancing existing reporting mechanisms.
2. This includes considering ways in which effective scrutiny as well as progress on implementing the Group's strategic objectives can be recorded and reported on.
3. The proposed changes focus is on finding ways to capture and publicise committee effectiveness and innovation. These include: revising the approach to reporting on committee activity; sharing statistical data that is currently collected; proposals for gathering data in other areas that would help demonstrate effective scrutiny; and capturing areas of innovation and good practice.
4. They are fairly modest in practice and so should be relatively easy to implement without creating too much additional work.

Background

5. The Conveners Group has agreed action plans for each of its strategic priorities. It receives regular updates from each of these workstreams so that Conveners are sighted on progress being made and can see developments taking place in these areas, as well as offering views or observations on ways forward.
6. A lot of progress has been made in implementing the action agreed under each of these headings. However, to date the Group has not considered ways in which progress being made can be recorded and reported on.
7. It could also be argued that the scrutiny work being carried out by individual committees receives less recognition than it deserves. Committees are required to produce annual reports of their activities over the previous parliamentary year but this information is mainly quantitative and doesn't cover a lot of detail of the activity of committees.
8. In order to help demonstrate the impact of the scrutiny function and how the Parliament supports accountability and transparency, the Conveners Group is invited to consider ways in which to record and report on its activities as well as the achievements of the committees.

9. This includes a package of measures to demonstrate effective scrutiny activity—
- Conveners Group annual report, which reports against progress on action plans to meet S6 strategic priorities—
 - Cross-cutting working
 - Post-EU Scrutiny
 - Net Zero Accountability
 - Participation, Diversity and Inclusion
 - Post-Legislative Scrutiny
 - Parliamentarian CPD
 - Enhanced committee annual reports with more detail on activity demonstrating effective scrutiny.
 - SPICe annual report which will report on SPICe activity in more detail.

Committee annual reports

10. As noted, committees are required to produce an annual report of their activities over the previous parliamentary year.

Existing requirements

11. Standing orders require the annual report to contain details of the committee's activities during that Parliamentary year, including details of its meetings and the number of times the committee has met in private, and how the committee has taken account of equal opportunities in its work.
12. In addition to this, committees are asked to provide detail of legislation considered, including secondary legislation and LCMs, as well as petitions considered and details of inquiry work.
13. These are the minimum requirements under the rules and the reports provide a valuable record of activity over the previous parliamentary year. Some committees also use the annual report as an opportunity to highlight other work they have undertaken during the reporting year. However, there is no uniform approach across committees.

Enhanced reporting mechanisms

14. The current reporting requirements largely involve quantitative data and statistics demonstrating activity. While there is also a lot of innovation and areas of enhanced scrutiny being carried out by committees this is not always given prominence.
15. To address this, there is scope for the annual reports to be expanded to include more qualitative information such as detail of committee inquiries work, as well as case studies, highlighting examples of innovation and best practice for all committees.

16. The Group has already agreed as part of its post-legislative scrutiny workstream to include a requirement for committees to include details of any post-legislative scrutiny undertaken in their annual reports. This is one way in which increased engagement with different types of scrutiny work has been encouraged. The success here has been demonstrated in the Group's most recent update on this strategic priority which shows that there has been a significant increase in post-legislative scrutiny being carried out compared to previous sessions.
17. In order to provide a more consistent account of scrutiny work, as well as encouraging innovation, it is proposed that all committees be asked more formally to provide further detail on scrutiny work, in addition to the existing annual report requirements. It is not anticipated this would not involve a huge amount of extra work but would ensure that this information is captured and publicised more widely.

Conveners Group annual report

18. There is no requirement for the Conveners Group to produce an annual report for each parliamentary year. However, this does not mean a report can't be produced. This could detail activity that has been undertaken by the Conveners Group during the previous parliamentary year as well as highlighting the scrutiny activity of committees captured in the proposed enhanced committee annual reports.
19. Such a report could provide a record of progress being made with the various actions under each strategic priority. This could be used as a way in which to demonstrate the ongoing achievements of the Group to the wider public as well as showcasing the scrutiny work being undertaken by committees.
20. To be as impactful as possible, this report could contain information that paints a picture of the activity across the year, including areas of innovation and different models of working as well as reporting on key achievements in implementing the Group's strategic priorities. It is proposed that this report could also capture information from committee reports and SPICe reports highlighting key achievements to create an overall picture of scrutiny activity over the previous parliamentary year.

Next steps

21. If CG is content to pursue these enhanced reporting arrangements, it is proposed that, in addition to the current reporting requirements, committees are asked to provide detail of innovation and areas of enhanced scrutiny as part of their annual reports.
22. The Conveners Group annual report could draw on this information to produce a comprehensive account of committee scrutiny work over the previous parliamentary year. This report would also include information on progress being made with the implementation of the Conveners Group strategic priorities.

23. It is proposed that these arrangements would apply for annual reports for the current parliamentary year (2023/24).

24. In order to highlight this work in a wider forum, the Group may also wish to consider leading an annual debate on the work of committees.

Recommendation

25. The Conveners Group is invited to consider the proposed enhanced reporting arrangements for committees and for the Conveners Group and agree for these arrangements to apply for the current parliamentary year.

**Conveners Group clerking team
March 2024**

Conveners Group
Wednesday 20 March 2024
2nd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Transparency of financial interests of those providing evidence to committees

Introduction

1. This paper invites the Conveners Group to consider correspondence from the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee which relates to the transparency of the financial interests of those providing evidence to committees.

Background

2. The SPPA Committee wrote to the Chair of Conveners Group last year inviting the Group to consider this issue at an early meeting. The Chair has responded advising that this would be on the Group's agenda in due course, but that the Group's workload meant that it would not be possible to consider this issue until later on in the year.
3. For various reasons, this is the first opportunity in the Group's work programme to consider a response to the issues raised in the letter.

Further detail

4. The letter is attached in the annex. In it, the Committee raises concerns that in some cases, the financial interests of witnesses might not be known and could potentially influence the evidence provided by these witnesses.
5. The examples it provides include circumstances where the witnesses' evidence could undermine a source of funding or support; where the witness represents an organisation that could be subject either to financial gain or financial loss as the result of a policy proposal being considered; or where the witness might receive sponsorship from a commercial organisation.
6. The Committee notes that there will be circumstances in which it would not be appropriate to ask those providing evidence about their financial interests. The Committee also accepts that, while there would be many individuals and organisations that benefited from funding from external bodies, that would not influence their independence or evidence.
7. It also recognises that some committees might not wish to seek information from witnesses on financial interests or only to do so in certain circumstances.
8. However, it also considered that there might be some pieces of scrutiny in which it would be important to ensure transparency around the financial interests of those providing evidence.

9. The Committee invites the Conveners Group to consider these issues further.

Context

10. The transparency of the scrutiny process is something which all members take very seriously. Transparency is a founding principle of the Parliament and efforts are made to achieve this as far as possible in all aspects of parliamentary business. It is a serious concern if there is any sense that evidence being given could be compromised in a way that is not transparent to the Committee.

11. Conveners will also know that it is for committees to decide how to conduct their business. It is not proposed therefore to suggest the creation of a standard approach for all committees to apply.

12. However, Conveners will have their own views based on their experience. Sharing this experience will help to draw out the issues and provide insight into possible approaches.

13. This discussion provides the opportunity to explore the extent to which Conveners consider this to be an issue, what possible approaches could be taken and what other issues need to be taken into consideration.

Issues in more detail

14. Conveners will see from the correspondence that the SPPAC recognises the complexity of the issue and that there is not one simple response to this.

15. One matter to bear in mind is that the funding sources of witnesses can be very complex and indirect. For example, the Scottish Government can provide an overall funding stream which is provided to other national bodies or other partners who then allocate to recipients. Scottish Government funding can also be made through partnering with other organisations which also impacts on transparency. These examples show that the funding flow and where decisions are taken is not always obvious.

16. While this does not prevent the Parliament from seeking ways to increase transparency, it is worth noting that the circumstances will vary between witnesses and establishing a funding source may not be as straightforward as it first appears.

17. Given the complexities involved, the Parliament does not have the resources to establish the funding sources of each individual witness making submissions to or appearing before committees or the nature of the relationship with the Scottish Government or any other organisation. This is information that witnesses will need to provide themselves.

18. It is also important that this issue is treated sensitively and doesn't risk alienating witnesses. An inflexible approach, such as one where all witnesses are expected to declare up front the source of funding of their organisation, may potentially reduce the willingness of witnesses to participate in evidence sessions. This could

include the future engagement of witnesses in the Parliament's other participation activities, which could run counter to the Group's participation agenda.

19. A balance therefore needs to be struck between achieving transparency while avoiding the creation of barriers to hearing from certain witnesses.

Options

20. How committees handle inquiries and their engagement with witnesses and evidence is a matter for each committee to determine. Committees have their own relationships with their witnesses and stakeholders and it is for them to manage these relationships. This discussion offers some possible approaches to consider.

21. One option would be for a standard question to be included in calls for views asking witnesses to include in their responses a description of their financial arrangements with the Scottish Government or details of their funding sources. This could include providing a declaration where there is any impediment to witnesses providing uncompromised evidence, for example the witness declaring where there is a clause in their contract or other governance arrangement which restricts what they can and cannot say.

22. This approach avoids singling out any particular witnesses. It also puts the onus on the witnesses to be open about their financial circumstances.

23. In some cases, committees may only wish to seek this information in the context of oral evidence. In which case witnesses could be invited to consider whether there is anything in their financial interest that should be put on the record when they are invited to give evidence. Or the convener could invite witnesses at the outset of evidence sessions to set out this information for the record.

24. In all cases there is nothing stopping individual committee Members asking witnesses questions directly on these issues. If necessary, these points can also be raised with witnesses in writing following evidence sessions.

25. Any of these approaches could be applied by each committee on a case-by-case basis.

Next steps

26. The views of Conveners on these issues would be welcome in formulating a response to the SPPA Committee.

27. In particular Conveners are invited—

- to consider whether they consider this to be an issue that needs to be addressed.
- to reflect on the points set out in this paper and provide a view on the best approach.

- to consider whether there are any other issues that need to be explored in relation to this issue.

Recommendation

28. The Conveners Group is invited to share views on a possible response to the correspondence set out in the annex.

**Conveners Group clerking team
March 2024**

Annexe

Letter from Convener of Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

I am writing to you following a discussion that the SPPA Committee had at its meeting on 29 June 2023 in relation to the transparency of the financial interests of those providing evidence to committees.

This issue was discussed by the Committee as there was a concern that, in some cases, the financial interests of witnesses might not be known and could potentially influence the evidence provided by witnesses. The Committee recognised that there could be certain circumstances in which an individual or organisation might have a financial interest that could influence their evidence. For example, they might not wish to give evidence that could undermine a source of funding or support, they might represent an organisation that could be subject either to financial gain or financial loss as the result of a policy proposal, or they might receive sponsorship from a commercial organisation.

When the Committee discussed this issue, it recognised that there were circumstances in which it would not be appropriate to ask those providing evidence about their financial interests and, that while there would be many individuals and organisations that benefited from funding from external bodies, that would not influence their independence or evidence. The Committee also recognised that some committees might not wish to seek information from witnesses on financial interests or only to do so in certain circumstances. However, the Committee also considered that there might be some pieces of scrutiny in which it would be important to ensure transparency around the financial interests of those providing evidence.

For that reason, the Committee decided to write the Conveners Group to request that you consider this issue further at an early meeting after the summer recess. This letter has also been copied to all Committee Conveners to allow them to seek the views of their committees at their Business Planning Day discussions prior to any discussion at the Conveners Group.

I hope that the information provided in this letter is sufficient to inform a discussion at the Conveners Group on the transparency of the financial interests of those providing evidence to committees.