



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener
Finance and Public Administration Committee

By e mail

27 January 2026

Dear Kenneth

SPCB budget submission for 2026-27: follow up information

At the SPCB's evidence session to the Committee on 6 January 2026 in relation to its budget for 2026-27 we offered to provide the following supplementary information:

1. Parliament Visitor Numbers – comparison to pre-Covid.

After closing to the public in March 2020, the building reopened to the public in April 2022, with our full visitor offer restored by November 2022.

Please see summary below of visitor numbers since 2019-20:

FY	Visitors
2024-25	175,686
2023-24	194,020
2022-23	142,741
2021-22	6,878
2020-21	895
2019-20	260,176

2. The length of time recruitment is currently taking. This was in the context of the 5% vacancy gap discussion.

The Scottish Parliament's average recruitment timescale for Parliament staff is around three and a half months, with 93% of all job offers accepted by the first or second choice candidate.

The vacancy gap is an essential tool the Parliament uses to maximise our budget. It's the difference between the number of posts we have in the SPS and the number

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that are actually filled and is represented as a percentage (currently 5%). Because we know vacancies will arise in the year, the staffing budget can be over-allocated by this percentage, enabling us to fund more posts than if we didn't have a vacancy gap. Last year this was equivalent to around 30 Grade 4 posts. This saving can also be used to fund related staffing costs including temporary staff, maternity leave, sick leave, pay progression, and temporary promotions.

The Workforce Planning Request process was implemented in October 2023. The process ensures senior leaders have input to and oversight of vacancy and staff resourcing decisions whilst ensuring financial targets (vacancy gap) are achieved and the session 6 staffing baseline is maintained. This closer scrutiny of resourcing decisions was necessary as the reduction in the rate of staff turnover along with faster recruitment and security clearance timescales meant that achieving the vacancy gap required more active management than in previous years.

3. Any 'special deals' arranged with hotel groups to minimise extra hotel costs, especially in the context of recent substantial increases in Edinburgh hotel costs and more regular late sittings in Parliament

We have arrangements with a number of hotels who give the Scottish Parliament a preferential rate and will invoice us directly. These hotels and rates can be found within the following document: [EdinburghHotels UpdatedApril25.docx](#). These hotels usually provide rates on a season basis (low, mid and high).

4. Figures on desk occupancy within the Parliament.

Attendance at Holyrood follows a clear weekly cadence, with peak occupancy on sitting days and lower footfall on Mondays and Fridays and during recess. The latest figures available on desk occupancy for SPS staff on business days during the month of December 2025 averaged 66%.

Further work is being done to make this a 'real time' measure given that this is a key statistic on building utilisation and key to the development of future building management strategies.

To support collaboration and make best use of the estate, the Parliament is moving away from individual desk allocations, and introducing flexible, communal workspaces such as The Hub, alongside desk booking systems and shared office arrangements. These measures ensure the building remains a vibrant, efficient environment that aligns with how people now work, while maximising the value of available space.

5. Further details in relation to the 'shop review' referred to in the budget bid, as well as a breakdown of how the online and physical shops are performing in terms of income, and in what circumstances an overtime budget for staff working in the shop is required as well as clarifying shop opening hours.

The purpose of the review is to boost profit margins and customer experience by stocking and promoting high margin and high demand Scottish Parliament branded and unique items and decrease running costs. The SPCB will consider the outcome

of the review of the shop in March and this briefing can be provided to the Committee afterwards. This includes the balance of sales made on site vs the online shop; currently less than 3% of our sales are online.

There is a small overtime budget to pay for staff time as the team work on Public Holidays when the building is open, whilst most Parliamentary functions work in line with the office of the clerk. In keeping with SPCB employment contracts, all staff who work on public holidays are entitled to overtime.

6. Staff salary rates at the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

The audited and published 2024-25 SPSO accounts provide additional detail on staff salaries – please see excerpt from those accounts attached.

7. Reason for the year-on-year movement for the Travel and Accommodation line in Note 5, Page 78 of the 2024-25 SPCB Annual Accounts and, specifically, any link to hotel costs.

The 7% increase reported in Note 5 (based on the rounded totals) is mainly due to higher costs within the Edinburgh Accommodation Provision (EAP) and Engagement Provision (EP), partially offset by reductions in other provisions (mainly mileage claims withing Members Travel Provision).

The key drivers for the increase are:

Edinburgh Accommodation Provision

- Council Tax – Increase of £126,992 (253%) - most Members were receiving a 25% discount on their council tax as single occupiers, so they lost that discount as well as having to pay the 100% second home premium from April 2024.
- Rental Costs – Increase of £56,366 (14%) - rent freeze and eviction ban introduced during COVID ended in April 2024, rental costs across Edinburgh have been subject to significant increases.
- Hotel Costs – Increase of £19,951 (7%) – reflects external pricing conditions.

Engagement Provision

- Mailing Costs – Increase of £55,183 (9%) – Royal Mail price increases for first- and second-class mail in 2024.
- Advertising – Increase of £48,756 (28%) - 555 claims in 2023-24 vs 686 in 2024-25, average cost per claim up by 4%

I hope this information sufficiently addresses the outstanding issues raised in the Committee session.

Kind regards
Kerry Twyman

Chief Financial Officer/Director of Finance and Resilience
cc: David McGill, Clerk/Chief Executive

	2024-25	2023-24
Staff remuneration	£35,164- £100,893	£29,506- £100,893
Ombudsman remuneration	£135,000- £140,000	£120,000- £125,000
25th percentile remuneration	£41,978	£40,286
25th percentile pay ratio	3.3:1	3:1
Median remuneration	£60,414	£57,979
Median pay ratio	2.3:1	2.1:1
75th percentile remuneration	£60,414	£57,979
75th percentile pay ratio	2.3:1	2.1:1
Average Ombudsman remuneration	£137,500	£122,500
% difference in average Ombudsman remuneration	12%	14%
Average staff remuneration	£55,236	£53,291.29
% difference in average staff remuneration	4%	9%

The change in ratio between Ombudsman and staff remuneration and the percentage increase in Ombudsman and staff remuneration is due to applying a cost of living increase to all pay bands and alignment of the Ombudsman salary to Scottish Parliament pay scales.

The median pay ratio for the relevant financial year is consistent with the pay, reward and progression policies for SPSO's employees taken as a whole.

During the 2024-25 accounting period, we maintained the Living Wage Accreditation status.