



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP
Presiding Officer
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh

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7 December 2023

Dear Presiding Officer,

Proxy Voting Draft permanent proxy scheme

Thank you for your letter of 20 November setting out that you are content with our approach to proposals to make proxy voting permanent.

In your letter you refer to working with the Committee to issue a revised Presiding Officer Scheme. Attached is a revised draft scheme for your consideration.

The revised draft scheme incorporates the changes we are proposing with regard to removing eligibility criteria from the scheme and placing these in Standing Orders. It also includes the change to allow a Member to apply for a proxy vote on any day on which the Parliament is sitting.

It would be helpful if you were able to indicate whether you are content with the draft scheme. We note that under the current pilot any revisions to the scheme require consultation with both the Committee and the Bureau. It would therefore be helpful if you are supportive of the schemes wording if you could consult the Bureau with these proposals to establish its view.

As you are aware we are seeking to ensure that a permanent proxy voting system is in place before the current pilot scheme ends on 31 December 2023. To facilitate this it would be helpful for the Committee to have received in advance of that date confirmation of whether both you and the Bureau are content with the Committee's proposals.

Yours sincerely

Martin Whitfield MSP

Convener

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Draft Proxy Voting Scheme

Purpose of scheme

The scheme has been issued by the Presiding Officer under Standing Orders Rule 11.5A – Proxy Voting.

The scheme may be varied by the Presiding Officer at any time, in consultation with the Parliamentary Bureau and the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

Arrangements for a proxy and further information

A Member must send all emails relating to the arrangement of a proxy vote from their own email account. Please note that another person emailing on the Member's behalf will not be accepted for any of the arrangements relating to the designation, variation, withdrawal or temporary withdrawal of a proxy.

Any queries about the scheme should be directed, in the first instance, to the office of the Presiding Officer (at Presidingofficers@parliament.scot) copied to the Business Team (at business.team@parliament.scot).

Designation of a proxy

A Member can designate any other Member as their proxy. A Member can only designate one proxy at a time.

A Member can be designated as a proxy by a maximum of two other Members.

Designation of a proxy must be made by the Member from their Parliamentary email account by 10.00am on any day there is a meeting of the Parliament during which votes will be held for which a Member wishes to designate a proxy. Designations should set out the anticipated duration of a proxy.

Designations must be made to the office of the Presiding Officer (at Presidingofficers@parliament.scot) copied to the Business Team (at business.team@parliament.scot).

Following receipt of any designations, Presiding Officer will direct Parliamentary officials to verify that—

- Member A wishes to designate Member B as their proxy
- Member B agrees to be designated as proxy for Member A and does not hold more than one other proxy
- both Member A and Member B have read and agree to the terms of the scheme.

The responses from Members to Parliamentary officials seeking to verify the arrangement must be sent from Members' Parliamentary email account. This verification procedure will ensure that there can be no dubiety about the agreement of the Members concerned to act in accordance with the terms of this scheme.

Variation or withdrawal of proxies

A Member cannot vote if they have an arrangement for a proxy vote in place. In the event that a Member varies or withdraws their proxy, it is the responsibility of the Member to inform their proxy of this.

A proxy cannot be varied or withdrawn once a vote has commenced.

Variation of a proxy

Where it becomes apparent that a designated proxy will no longer be able to participate in a meeting of the Parliament, a Member can designate another proxy up to 10am on the day of any meeting of the Parliament for which the proxy would apply. To do this, Members must follow the procedure set out above for the designation of a proxy and indicate the duration of the alternative arrangement.

The designation of an alternative proxy would be subject to the verification process set out above.

Withdrawal of a proxy

A Member who has designated a proxy may withdraw that designation at any point up to 10.00am on the day of any meeting of the Parliament at which the Member wishes to participate and cast their own vote. This withdrawal must be notified to the office of the Presiding Officer (at Presidingofficers@parliament.scot) copied to the Business Team (at business.team@parliament.scot).

Temporary withdrawal of a proxy

In the event that a Member who has designated a proxy wishes to participate and vote cast their own vote on a temporary basis, they must notify the office of the Presiding Officer (at Presidingofficers@parliament.scot) copied to the Business Team (at business.team@parliament.scot) by 10.00am on the day of any meeting of the Parliament at which that Member wishes to attend or cast their own vote and indicate the period of time for which they would like to temporarily withdraw the proxy.

Confirmation of proxies

To ensure transparency, where a proxy has been exercised in a vote, this will be recorded in the minute of the relevant meeting of the Parliament or of the Committee of the Whole Parliament.

Casting of votes

Proxy votes will be cast using the digital voting system. In the event the Member who holds a proxy (or proxies) is unable to use the digital voting system the Presiding Officer will invite the Member to indicate how it is being exercised following the conclusion of a vote and will direct the Clerk to record the vote before any other Points of Order on voting are taken.

Exercising the proxy vote and conduct

A Member who designates another Member as their proxy, places in that Member the highest degree of trust in carrying out one of the most fundamental rights granted to those who hold elected office.

It is the responsibility of the Member who has designated a proxy to make sure that their proxy is fully aware of when and how they wish their vote to be cast. A Member designated as a proxy will be expected to act in strict accordance with the request of the Member whose vote they are casting.

A Member designated as a proxy might cast their own vote one way and the proxy vote the other or may cast a proxy vote without casting their own vote at all.

Members are reminded of the requirements to treat other Members with courtesy and respect under the relevant provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct and the Standing Orders, and any intentional misuse of a proxy vote could result in a breach of these requirements.

Application of the scheme

The scheme will apply in relation to any meeting of the Parliament or a Committee of the Whole Parliament.