

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body – Tuesday 16 June 2026 (Session 7)

SPICe Diversity Data on MSPs – Collation and Publication, Session 7

Executive summary

1. This paper sets out the circumstances leading to the publication of MSP diversity data before it was confirmed directly with individual MSPs, the approach to correct this and relevant background and policy considerations.
2. More fundamentally it sets out why data is collected and how it is used for various purposes, including publication on the parliament website to support transparency for the public seeking a representative and equality monitoring.
3. The SPCB is invited to agree to publish MSP diversity data where consent is given.

Background

Parliamentary data – why data is collated and published and how it is used

4. The Parliament has historically collated and published diversity data on MSPs to support transparency for the public seeking a representative and equality monitoring over sessions 1-6. This information is held as a public record.
5. Diversity information is added to a system called the Common Data Model – this holds various parliamentary data (including MSP parties, constituency/region, roles). This data is then used in relevant parliamentary systems such as the web site and Open Data. (Open Data makes parliamentary datasets available to allow others to conduct their own analysis or mash data with other data that they hold.) It is also aggregated in the SPICe statistics volumes and may be used for other purposes – such as answering queries from MSPs (for example, the number of parliamentary questions asked by females.)
6. Historically, this data was searchable on the Parliament website: the public were able to filter MSPs by gender, with drop down options being male and female.
7. Publication informs the public about their elected representatives. It assists constituents in identifying who they may wish to consult or represent them, and it

REFERENCE: SPCB (2026) - Paper 46 - by correspondence

provides accurate and transparent information on diversity, including female representation at Holyrood, over time.

8. Most of the correspondence from the public about the filter focuses on transparency of representation at Holyrood, and to a lesser extent the need to be able to select MSPs by sex because of particular concerns constituents may have
9. In addition, the Gender Sensitive Audit (A Parliament for All, March 2023) (“GSA”), in Session 6, made two specific recommendations [see **Annexe A**] and strengthened expectations for collection and publication of diversity data at the start of each session.
10. The GSA recommended that SPICe “update and extend existing MSP/Candidate Diversity data, analysis and information” by issuing “a diversity data monitoring form to all MSPs and repeat this at the start of each session.” It also recommended that SPICe explore “the presentation of publicly accessible, longitudinal and intersectional diversity data on MSPs, ensuring the gathering, collation and any publication of such information and complies with General Data Protection Regulations protecting the privacy of Members’ personal data.”
11. The GSA had cross party support with its recommendations endorsed by Parliament.

Why the website filter was removed

12. Following the election, some publicly available diversity information was mistakenly used to update the system (Common Data Model) that feeds the Parliament’s website. That information was not sourced from, or verified by, current MSPs and was not collected in line with the recommendations for our new practice as set out in the GSA report of March 2023.
13. Once identified, it was removed from the Parliament’s website. This decision was taken by officials to allow for investigation and correction of the error and to ensure that the web data functions in a manner that complies with all the requirements on the SPCB as the service provider and website host.
14. As noted above, the diversity information is added to a system called the Common Data Model – and this data is then pulled through to other parliamentary systems and used for answering queries etc. It is important that it is accurate and collected and published in line with data protection and other requirements.

Steps taken to correct the issue

15. Officials have been working to resolve this issue. The matter is complex, and there are various considerations to be balanced in finding a solution and adding accurate data to our parliamentary system (Common Data Model) as well as surfacing the data through the website and elsewhere. Throughout we have been mindful of sensitivities and worked to ensure that there is not only a clear legal basis for action but also that this work is undertaken respectfully.
16. Officials devised an approach to ensure the accuracy of data and to reinstate a website filter for Session 7 data. This approach balanced the SPCB's duties under data protection and equalities legislation, and various items of correspondence were answered on this basis.
17. Accordingly, on Monday 1 June 2026, all MSPs were invited to complete a short survey on sex and, as appropriate, trans status. It has been partially pre-populated using information already held in our payroll system provided by MSPs for HMRC purposes.
18. The survey comprises three questions and uses terminology aligned with Scotland's Census. This process marks a new confirmation step in our process to ensure that relevant diversity information is confirmed directly with individual MSPs before use. This is in line with both the recommendations of the GSA report and data protection requirements.
19. The short survey seeks MSPs' consent to publication of their personal data on the Parliament's website. In particular, it will be used in relation to the website search filter on current MSP profiles; and for internal and external reporting on aggregate data concerning the demographics of the Parliament's elected representatives. The survey will also support implementation of recommendations arising from the Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit.
20. The data involved is sensitive and will be handled carefully. Officials will engage with MSPs and provide appropriate support. Whilst the survey deadline was 5 June, responses are still coming in and are being updated in the Common data model and for publication on the website.

Issues

21. This issue is being heavily scrutinised internally and externally with correspondence and feedback reflecting competing expectations, summarised as rationale for collation and publication, visibility and transparency of elected representatives and to a lesser extent representation issues from the public.

REFERENCE: SPCB (2026) - Paper 46 - by correspondence

22. We do not expect that the current survey will offer a complete picture of MSP sex and trans status as some MSPs, as entitled, are likely to “not disclose” for various reasons. This is likely to mean that the SPCB’s data for the filter service on the website will be partial. Officials are therefore seeking SPCB agreement on the level of diversity reporting it wishes to take in future for Session 7, before we finalise the remedial work we have been carrying out.
23. Officials have considered and recommend that the SPCB publish diversity data where consent is given as this achieves a balance between a complex and sensitive set of factors.
24. The SPCB will be continuing to provide an established service – based on accurate data – and to do so in a manner that complies with all of its obligations in the round. The rationale for doing so is to support transparency with the public engaging with their elected members and for monitoring and reporting diversity within Parliament longitudinally.
25. The business rationale is long established and feedback from the public and Members is predominantly reflective of this to date; it aligns with the recommendations in the Gender Sensitive Audit which had cross party support to improve monitoring, reporting and transparency on the diversity of elected representatives.
26. The SPCB will have discharged its responsibilities: it is for individual MSPs to weigh up the business rationale and decide to disclose/not disclose their personal information as the approach is based on freely given consent.
27. The SPCB will still attract criticism that its website filter is not fit for purpose if not all MSPs data is presented. The response to this is that it cannot repurpose data held for HMRC purposes for use in the website filter without explicit consent. Nor can it fulfil the business purpose without asking MSPs directly about their trans status and securing their consent to any such information being published on the website.
28. It is possible of course that the issue of collation and publication of data for wider monitoring and reporting issues is one that members themselves may wish to address in session 7, rather than SPCB. This is already the case in other UK legislatures - for example, in Wales where the Senedd passed legislation requiring political parties to collate and publish diversity data.

Governance

29. This is a matter for SPCB decision.

Resource implications

30. This work has been carried out within existing resources.

Publication Scheme

31. This paper can be published.

Next steps

32. Subject to SPCB decision, the survey process will be completed and the technical work on the website with publication arrangements finalised.

Decision

33. The SPCB is invited to agree to publish MSP diversity data where consent is given.

Office of the Deputy Chief Executive
June 2026

Annexe A: Extract from recommendations of the Gender Sensitive Audit

Recommendations 9 and 10 from the Gender Sensitive Audit deal specifically with the collection and publication of diversity data:

Recommendation 9

SPICe to update and extend existing MSP Candidate Diversity data, analysis and information:

- Issue diversity data monitoring form to all MSPs and repeat this at the start of each session.
- Explore the presentation of publicly accessible, longitudinal and intersectional diversity data on MSPs, ensuring the gathering, collation and any publication of such information and complies with General Data Protection Regulations protecting the privacy of Members' personal data.

Recommendation 10

SPICe to explore the creation and presentation of new MSP/Candidate diversity data (ensuring it complies with General Data Protection Regulations protecting the privacy of Members' personal data)

- To include information from the fielding of a 'parents and carers' in Parliament survey (see Annex B as an example of such a survey)
- To include information identified in any new disability audit (see recommendation that the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group commission a disability audit of the Parliament).