

Written Submission from Peter Murrell, Chief Executive, SNP

Dear Linda

I am responding to your letter of 7 July 2020.

The fact that the committee intended to seek my evidence was made known to me by a journalist on 18 June 2020. A further enquiry on 1 August 2020 from another journalist suggests that the committee will seek to ask me about matters out-with the terms of the inquiry remit or approach to the inquiry as set out in Annex C.

Notwithstanding those concerns, I have prepared my response after careful consideration of your letter, the terms of the inquiry remit, and the annexes provided. There are aspects of your request that are not entirely clear but I have sought to interpret them as reasonably and as fully as I can.

1. Separation of SNP/Scottish Government roles

- a) The principal onus of ensuring that politicians – whether members of parliament or government ministers – do not use public office for party political purposes rests with the individual concerned. SNP MSPs abide by the Scottish Parliament Code of Conduct and Ministers abide by the Ministerial Code of Conduct. Special Advisers are bound by the Special Advisers Code of Conduct and also the Civil Service Code.
- b) The SNP does not know how the Scottish Government holds information.
- c) The SNP expects any of its members who hold public office – including ministerial office – to abide by the relevant rules of their office in terms of the appropriate separation of roles. The SNP cannot be the arbiter of what is or is not government business as we are not privy to the detail of government business. My understanding is that government business is subject to Freedom of Information legislation regardless of the channels it is conducted on. I assume therefore that a Minister or SpAd could not use party channels for government business as a way of avoiding transparency.
- d) You ask me for instances where ‘this’ (by which I assume you mean instances where a minister has used SNP channels when they should have used Scottish Government channels) may have been the case. I am not aware of any such instances. However, it would be entirely appropriate for Ministers to use SNP rather than Scottish Government channels for party political business.

2. SNP disciplinary and grievance procedures

I attach copies of the following documents: -

- Code of Conduct for Members
- Disciplinary Rules
- Standing Orders for the SNP Group in the Scottish Parliament
- Standing Orders for the SNP Group on the United Kingdom Parliament

I also attach the Grievance Procedure for employees of the Scottish National Party based at our Edinburgh headquarters. The Committee will be aware that there are a number of additional employment relationships, procedures and policies within Holyrood and Westminster for all those undertaking parliamentary duties and activities in those locations or elsewhere.

Finally, I am attaching an email issued to all elected representatives and staff on 31 October 2017. It outlines an additional confidential, independent mechanism for reporting inappropriate behaviour following the emergence of the MeToo movement and media reports concerning the alleged behaviour of parliamentarians both at Holyrood and Westminster.

The SNP has no communications between it and any of the individuals listed in your letter, in relation to the complaints raised under the Scottish Government procedure on handling of harassment complaints invoicing current or former ministers.

3. Requests of me in a personal capacity

- a) I became aware that complaints had been made under the Scottish Government procedure when the matter became public in August 2018. I knew about the meetings between Nicola and Alex Salmond at our home on 2 April and 14 July 2018 and I had the sense that something serious was being discussed. Nicola told me she couldn't discuss the details. The nature of Nicola's job means that when she tells me she can't discuss something, I don't press it.
- b) There was no action taken by the SNP in relation to these complaints before the matter became public in August 2018.
- c) The only such discussions would have been after the matter became public in August 2018 and in relation to the Party's response.
- d) I was aware of meetings that took place at our home on 2 April and 14 July 2018, involving certain of the individuals listed. I was not present at these meetings and made no contribution to them.

I have no direct knowledge of and therefore no comment to make on the development of the Scottish Government complaints policy, the judicial review, the application of the ministerial code and the civil service code, the handling of the complaints by the Scottish Government, or the culture within the Scottish Government.

Yours sincerely

PETER MURRELL
Chief Executive
4 August 2020

Code of Conduct for Members

1 Applicability

Every member of the Scottish National Party is required to abide by the Party's Code of Conduct which is set out in Rule 2.

2 Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct sets out minimum standards of behaviour which the Party expects from every member of the Party so that the Party may function in pursuing its aims in accordance with its constitutionally laid down policy and direction. The Party consists at any given time of all its members and therefore every member has a duty to adhere to and promote adherence to the standards.

The SNP conduct Standards

- 1 Every member owes a duty to the Party to abide by its constitutionally laid down policy and direction and its Constitution, Rules and Standing Orders.
- 2 A member shall not disavow the aims of the Party in whole or in part.
- 3 Members shall respect each other's good faith in endorsing the Party's aims.
- 4 Every member owes a duty to the Party to refrain from conduct likely to cause damage to or hinder the Party's proper pursuit of its aims in accordance with its constitutionally laid down policy and direction.
- 5 No member may make racist statements in any context.
- 6 Every member has a responsibility not to discriminate in his or her conduct on the ground of race, colour, gender, religious belief or non-belief or sexual orientation.
- 7 No member may make malicious allegations of illegal or improper conduct against any other member or maliciously cause to be reported or published in the media the fact that an allegation of illegal or improper conduct by a member is known to have been made.
- 8 No member shall abuse, harass or bully or maliciously defame any other member whether via the media or otherwise.

- 9 No member shall be a member of any organisation contesting elections in opposition to the Party or deemed to be a political party under the Party's Membership Rules or announce an intention to join any such organisation.
- 10 No member shall stand for election to a Scottish local authority, the Scottish Parliament, the Parliament of the United Kingdom or the European Parliament other than as a Party candidate.
- 11 At the first Scottish local authority elections occurring after 1 July 2004, Party members who are incumbent Independent Councillors may stand then for election as Independent Councillors, provided this does not involve standing against official SNP candidates and, if elected, may serve as Independent Councillors for one further term.
- 12 Any member elected as a Party candidate to any level of government owes duties to the Party to sign the Party's group Standing Orders for that level of government as soon as practicable after being elected and to re-sign the group standing orders as soon as practicable after any amendment of them by the Party.
- 13 Any member resigning from a Party group at any level of government owes a duty to the Party also to resign as a member of the local authority or Parliament to which he/she was elected as a Party candidate.
- 14 No member shall make a statement on behalf of a Branch, Constituency Association, Liaison Committee, recognised Members' Association or Affiliated Organisation of the Party without the authority of that organisation nor make any such statement that he/she knows or ought to know does not properly reflect the position of the body in question.
- 15 All members owe a duty to the Party to respect the internal confidentiality of Office Bearer reports to the Party and of papers issued only within the Party except insofar as these have been put into the public domain by or with the authority of the National Executive Committee.

Disciplinary Rules*

- 1 Composition and meetings of the Disciplinary Committee
 - 1.1 The Disciplinary Committee consists of 9 members of the Party who are neither members of the National Executive Committee nor of the Appeals Committee.
 - 1.2 The members of the Disciplinary Committee are elected annually at National Conference. If less than 9 are elected, the National Executive Committee appoints the remaining members. The National Executive Committee appoints a Disciplinary Committee Convener from the membership of the Disciplinary Committee.
 - 1.3 The Disciplinary Committee meets as often as required to ensure that all complaints presented to the Disciplinary Committee under Rule 3 can be considered no later than one month after being presented. The minimum quorum for Disciplinary Committee meetings is 5 but all its members owe a duty of regular attendance. The chairperson at a Disciplinary Committee meeting is the Disciplinary Committee Convener whom failing a deputy appointed by the Disciplinary Committee Convener. The chairperson is responsible for the fair conduct of a Disciplinary Committee meeting. Decisions of Disciplinary Committee meetings are made by majority vote of those members attending. The chairperson has deliberative and casting votes. It is the Disciplinary Committee Convener's responsibility to ensure that Disciplinary Committee meetings are minuted.
- 2 Composition and meetings of the Appeals Committee
 - 2.1 The Appeals Committee consists of 7 members of the Party who are members neither of the National Executive Committee nor of the Disciplinary Committee (subject to the proviso that it has up to 15 members until the end of Annual National Conference in September 2004).
 - 2.2 The members of the Appeals Committee are elected annually at National Conference. If less than 7 are elected, the National Executive Committee appoints the remaining members. The National Executive

* Under the Transitional Directions, in these Rules "Disciplinary Committee" is replaced with "Member Conduct Committee" and "Appeals Committee" is replaced with "Conduct Appeals Committee".

Committee appoints an Appeals Committee Convener from the membership of the Appeals Committee.

- 2.3 The National Executive Committee appoints an Appeals Committee Clerk who is a member of the Party who has experience in law but is not a member of the National Executive Committee, the Disciplinary Committee or the Appeals Committee. The Appeals Committee Clerk has the responsibility to maintain accurate records of Appeals Committee proceedings and is delegated by the Appeals Committee Convener the task of communicating information to parties involved in appeals. The Appeals Committee Clerk may also respond to requests for procedural advice from the chairperson of an Appeals Committee meeting but the chairperson is responsible for assessing the worth of the advice and receipt of the advice in no way qualifies the responsibility of the chairperson to ensure that the meeting follows fair procedure. The Appeals Committee Clerk is bound by the same responsibilities of confidentiality as Appeals Committee members.
- 2.4 The minimum quorum for Appeals Committee meetings is 3 but all its members owe a duty of regular attendance. The chairperson at any Appeals Committee meeting is the Appeals Committee Convener whom failing a deputy appointed by the Convener. It is the chairperson's responsibility to ensure that the meeting follows fair procedure in hearing an appeal. Decisions of Appeals Committee meetings are made by majority vote of those members attending. The chairperson has deliberative and casting votes.

3 Complaints to the Disciplinary Committee

- 3.1 The Disciplinary Committee shall consider "complaints" presented to it by the National Secretary.
- 3.2 A "complaint" presented by the National Secretary is a proposal by him/her that the Disciplinary Committee should take disciplinary measures against a member of the Party on one of the following Grounds—
 - (a) That the member has contravened the Constitution or Rules;
 - (b) That the member has breached one of the numbered Standards in the Party's Code of Conduct.
- 3.3 The National Secretary must present such a complaint to the Disciplinary Committee if he/she is directed to do so by the National Executive Committee or if he/she has exercised the National

Secretary's power of suspension in the Constitution and otherwise may present such a complaint to the Disciplinary Committee if he/she considers that it is appropriate to do so having regard to information received and/or inquiries made by him/her. In cases where the National Secretary does not consider it appropriate to present a complaint he/she may nevertheless write to parties involved appropriately confirming the requirements of the Constitution and Rules and/or the Code of Conduct.

- 3.4 The National Secretary's complaint must be presented in writing to the Disciplinary Committee Convener and must at minimum specify—
 - (i) The Ground on which he/she proposes that the Disciplinary Committee should take disciplinary measures; and
 - (ii) (a) In the case of Ground 3.2(a), the provision of the Constitution or Rules that the member is alleged to have contravened and the manner and circumstances in which he/she is alleged to have contravened it;

(b) In the case of Ground 3.2(b), the Standard in the Code of Conduct that the member is alleged to have breached (which may not be Standard 4 unless the National Secretary considers that none of the other Standards is specifically applicable in the circumstances of the case) and the manner and circumstances in which he/she is alleged to have breached it.
- 3.5 The Disciplinary Committee shall not consider a complaint that lacks the above minimum specification.
- 3.6 At the same time as, or as soon as reasonably practicable after, presenting the written complaint to the Disciplinary Committee Convener, the National Secretary must send written notification of the presenting of the complaint to the member concerned enclosing copies of the written complaint and any documents annexed to it and also notifying the member that—
 - (a) he/she shall be sent at least 14 days prior notification of the date on, time at which and place where the Disciplinary Committee will meet to consider the complaint;
 - (b) he/she is invited to submit a written response (including annexed documents) to the complaint to the Disciplinary Committee Convener at Party HQ and the Disciplinary

Committee is obliged to take into account that response if received at Party HQ by 5pm on the day which is three days before the date on which the Disciplinary Committee meets to consider the complaint;

- (c) whether or not he/she submits a written response, he/she may attend in person on the date when and at the place where the Disciplinary Committee will meet to consider the complaint and, if he/she does so attend by the time at which the Disciplinary Committee is to meet, he/she will be heard in person by the Disciplinary Committee as part of its consideration of the complaint;
- (d) if he/she does attend in person, he/she may be accompanied by another Party member to assist him/her in explaining his/her position to the Disciplinary Committee.

3.7 The National Secretary must provide a copy of that notification to the Disciplinary Committee Convener.

4 Date, time and place and notification of meeting of the Disciplinary Committee to consider a complaint

4.1 The National Secretary must liaise with the Disciplinary Committee Convener to arrange the date on, time at which and place where the Disciplinary Committee Convener will convene a Disciplinary Committee meeting to consider any complaint.

4.2 The date should be one which is no later than one calendar month after the complaint is presented but which allows for the National Secretary to send at least fourteen days prior notification of the date, time and place of the meeting to the member.

4.3 The National Secretary must send that notification to the member and provide a copy of the notification to the Disciplinary Committee Convener.

5 Consideration and disposal of complaint by Disciplinary Committee

5.1 The Disciplinary Committee must take into account any response (including annexed documents) submitted timeously by the member.

5.2 If the member attends timeously on the date when and at the place where the Disciplinary Committee is meeting to consider the complaint, the Disciplinary Committee will hear the member in

person as part of its consideration of the complaint and if the member has brought another member of the Party to assist him/her in presenting his/her position to the Disciplinary Committee that other member will be permitted to assist.

- 5.3 If the National Secretary timeously attends on the date when and at the place where the Disciplinary Committee is meeting to consider the complaint, he/she is entitled to be present at the meeting if and when the Disciplinary Committee is hearing the member in person. The Disciplinary Committee is entitled to seek comment from the National Secretary, in presence of the member, on any matter arising during its hearing of the member.
- 5.4 If the Disciplinary Committee finds the Ground of complaint to be not established it shall dismiss the complaint.
- 5.5 If the Disciplinary Committee finds the ground of complaint to be established it shall, taking reasonable account of all the circumstances, impose one of the three disciplinary measures of admonition, suspension for a fixed period not exceeding six months or expulsion or, in exceptional circumstances where the Disciplinary Committee does not consider it would be fair to impose any disciplinary measure, discharge the complaint.
- 5.6 Where the Disciplinary Committee imposes a suspension of three months or less, it shall be open to the Disciplinary Committee to direct that the suspension shall not come into effect before the later of
 - (a) the time having passed for presenting any appeal without any appeal having been presented; or
 - (b) the dismissal of any appeal presented.
- 5.7 The Disciplinary Committee's disposal shall have immediate effect (subject to a deferral direction in the case of suspension) and be final and binding subject only to the member's right of appeal to the Appeals Committee against an admonition, suspension or expulsion.
- 5.8 The Disciplinary Committee Convener shall report the disposal to the National Secretary and to the member. In a case where the disposal is one of admonition, suspension or expulsion the Disciplinary Committee Convener's report to the member concerned shall advise him/her that he/she has the right to appeal to the Appeals Committee and that he/she may exercise that right by intimating his/her intention to do so to the National Secretary within 21 days. Any disposal of

suspension or expulsion of the member shall have the effect of suspending his/her membership of or expelling him/her from any Party group at any level of government of which he/she is a member and it is the National Secretary's responsibility to intimate such disposal of suspension or expulsion and its effect to the Secretary of the group. It is the National Secretary's responsibility to intimate the disposal to the next meeting of National Conference or National Council.

- 6 Appeals to the Appeals Committee against admonition, suspension or expulsion by the Disciplinary Committee
 - 6.1 A member who has been admonished, suspended or expelled by the Disciplinary Committee has the right to appeal to the Appeals Committee and may exercise that right by intimating his/her intention to do so to the National Secretary within 21 days of the Disciplinary Committee Convener's report to him/her of the Disciplinary Committee disposal.
 - 6.2 Appeal may only be pursued on one or more of the following grounds—
 - (a) That on the information before the Disciplinary Committee it was unreasonable for the Disciplinary Committee to find the ground of complaint to be established.
 - (b) That there is relevant, reliable and significant information that was not before the Disciplinary Committee that would have been likely to cause the Disciplinary Committee to find that the ground of complaint was not established.
 - (c) That the Disciplinary Committee's consideration of the complaint was procedurally unfair to the member to a significant extent.
 - (d) That the disciplinary measure imposed was excessive.
 - 6.3 The National Secretary must acknowledge any intimation of intention to appeal to the member, advise him/her of the four grounds on which appeal may be pursued and require the member to give written notification ("the appeal statement") to the National Secretary within twenty one days of the one or more grounds on which he/she wishes to appeal and, in the case of Grounds 6.2 (a) and (c) respectively, of the information referred to and/or the respects in which the member

considers the Disciplinary Committee's consideration of the complaint to have been procedurally unfair.

- 6.4 On receipt of the appeal statement the National Secretary shall refer it and the previous intimation of intention to appeal to the Appeals Committee Convener.
- 6.5 Thereafter the Appeals Committee Convener shall communicate with the member and the National Secretary through the Appeals Committee Clerk regarding arrangements for an Appeals Committee meeting to consider the appeal and prior exchanging of copies of documents and lists of witnesses intended to be brought to the meeting. The member, if he/she so wishes, shall be entitled to bring another member of the Party to the meeting to assist him/her in presenting his/her appeal and shall be advised of that right in the communications with him/her regarding arrangements for the meeting.
- 6.6 The Appeals Committee Convener shall seek to achieve that the meeting of the Appeals Committee to consider the appeal shall take place within no longer than one calendar month from his/her receipt of the appeal statement subject to avoiding dates and times that are not reasonably practicable for the member or the National Secretary and subject to both the member and the National Secretary receiving at least fourteen days notice of the date, time and place fixed and of their right to attend and bring relevant documents and witnesses.
- 6.7 If no ground of appeal is upheld by the Appeals Committee, it shall dismiss the appeal.
- 6.8 If any of grounds 6.2 (a), (b) or (c) is upheld by the Appeals Committee, it shall recall the Disciplinary Committee's decision to impose a disciplinary measure and dismiss the original complaint.
- 6.9 If only Ground 6.2 (d) is upheld by the Appeals Committee, it shall recall the Disciplinary Committee's decision imposing a disciplinary measure and either impose a lesser disciplinary measure or discharge the original complaint.
- 6.10 The Appeals Committee Convener per the Appeals Committee Clerk shall report the Appeals Committee's disposal to the member and to the National Secretary. The Appeals Committee's disposal shall be final and binding and not subject to further appeal. An Appeals Committee disposal that recalls a Disciplinary Committee decision imposing either a suspension that was not subject to a deferral

direction or expulsion has the effect of recalling any consequent suspension from membership of or expulsion from a Party group at any level of government and it is the National Secretary's responsibility to intimate such an Appeals Committee disposal and its effect to the Secretary of the group. An Appeals Committee disposal that itself imposes suspension on a member shall have the effect of suspending his/her membership of any Party group at any level of government of which he/she is a member and it is the National Secretary's responsibility to intimate such a disposal and its effect to the Secretary of the group. It shall be the responsibility of the National Secretary formally to intimate the disposal to the next meeting of National Conference or National Council.

7 Appeals to Appeals Committee against expulsions from Party local authority groups

- 7.1 The Appeals Committee also has the function of hearing appeals against expulsions from Party local authority groups referred to it by the National Secretary in accordance with the Party's standing orders for its local authority groups.
- 7.2 After such an appeal is referred to the Appeals Committee the Appeals Committee Convener shall communicate with the Councillor concerned and the Secretary of the local authority group through the Appeals Committee Clerk regarding arrangements for a meeting of the Appeals Committee to consider the appeal and prior exchanging of copies of documents and lists of witnesses intended to be brought to the meeting.
- 7.3 The Convener shall seek to achieve that the meeting of the Appeals Committee to consider the appeal shall take place within no longer than one calendar month from the appeal being referred to the Appeals Committee subject to avoiding dates and times that are not reasonably practicable for the Councillor or the Secretary of the local authority group and subject to both the Councillor and the Secretary of the local authority group receiving at least fourteen days notice of the date and time fixed and of their right to attend and bring relevant documents and witnesses. The Councillor shall be entitled to bring one member of the Party to the meeting to assist him in presenting his/her appeal.
- 7.4 The Appeals Committee shall uphold the appeal and quash the expulsion if it is satisfied that the expulsion was not effected in accordance with group standing orders or that there was other

significant unfairness in the expulsion procedure or if it considers that in the circumstances expulsion was unfair or excessive but, if it not so satisfied or if it does not so consider, it shall dismiss the appeal.

- 7.5 The Appeals Committee's disposal shall be final and binding and not subject to further appeal. The Appeals Committee Convener through the Appeals Committee Clerk shall report the disposal to the Councillor, the Secretary of the local authority group and the National Secretary. The National Secretary shall intimate the disposal to the next meeting of National Conference or National Council.
 - 7.6 In the event of the appeal having been upheld and the expulsion quashed it is the duty of the office bearers of the local authority group to ensure that the disposal is given practical effect as soon as is reasonably practicable.
 - 7.7 In the event of the National Secretary having presented a Rule 3 complaint to the Disciplinary Committee against the Councillor on a ground relating to the Councillor's expulsion from the local authority group, the Disciplinary Committee shall not meet to consider that complaint until any appeal by the Councillor under this Rule 7 has been disposed of.
- 8 Appeals to Appeals Committee against deemed public intimation of resignation
- 8.1 The Appeals Committee has the further function of hearing appeals by members against having been deemed publicly to have intimated resignation from the Party.
 - 8.2 After such an appeal is referred to the Appeals Committee by the National Secretary in accordance with the Membership Rules the Appeals Committee Convener shall communicate with the member and the National Secretary through the Appeals Committee Clerk regarding arrangements for an Appeals Committee meeting to consider the appeal and prior exchanging of copies of documents and lists of witnesses intended to be brought to the meeting.
 - 8.3 The member, if he/she so wishes, shall be entitled to bring another member of the Party to the meeting to assist him/her in presenting his/her appeal and shall be advised of that right in the communications with him/her regarding arrangements for the meeting.

- 8.4 The Convener shall seek to achieve that the meeting of the Appeals Committee to consider the appeal shall take place within no longer than one calendar month from the appeal being referred to the Appeals Committee subject to avoiding dates and times that are not reasonably practicable for the member or the National Secretary and subject to both the member and the National Secretary receiving at least fourteen days notice of the date, time and place fixed and of their right to attend and bring relevant documents and witnesses.
- 8.5 The Appeals Committee shall uphold the appeal if it is satisfied either that the words or actions of the member that were deemed to constitute public intimation of resignation did not constitute such intimation or that the member did not in fact use the words or commit the acts deemed to constitute such intimation but shall otherwise dismiss the appeal.
- 8.6 The effect of an appeal being upheld by the Appeals Committee will be that with immediate effect from its being upheld the member will be entitled to be treated in all respects as if he/she had never been deemed to have intimated resignation.
- 8.7 The Appeals Committee's disposal shall be final and binding and not subject to further appeal. The Appeals Committee Convener through the Appeals Committee Clerk shall report the disposal to the member and to the National Secretary. The National Secretary shall intimate the disposal to the Secretary of any Party group at any level of government to which the member belonged when he/she was deemed to have intimated resignation. The National Secretary shall also intimate the disposal to the next meeting of National Conference or National Council.

Standing Orders for the SNP Group in the Scottish Parliament

1 Membership of the Group

Membership of the Group will be open to approved Scottish National Party candidates at the time of their election and who accept or have accepted in writing the Standing Orders of the Group. In all other cases membership shall be extended only to those Members who have applied for membership and accept the aims and policy of the SNP, as well as the Standing Orders of the Group.

2 Responsibilities and Conduct of Members

Members will—

- (a) Abide by and support the SNP's policies, Group discipline and Group decisions.
- (b) Treat their position as a full-time commitment with an attendance and work rate commensurate with that status. The Chief Whip will be responsible for advising the Group if the performance of any Member is inconsistent with this standard.
- (c) Adhere to the Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament.
- (d) Accept that no Member shall within, or outwith the Parliament, publicly criticise a Group decision, policy or another Member of the Group.
- (e) Accept that Members elected to Constituency seats will be expected to establish a constituency office and to liaise with the Party organisations covering their constituency; whilst those Members elected to Regional seats will be expected to contribute to the funding and running costs of regional offices to support their work and to liaise with the relevant Regional Association.
- (f) Recognise the importance of the Group staff in providing support to the SNP Group in Parliament. All Members of the Group will therefore be required to contribute equally from their Members' Allowance Scheme to the cost of maintaining the Group Staff, at a level set by the Group.

- (g) Adhere to all decisions taken democratically by the Group. Any Member registering their dissent at the time of the Group decision must meet with the Chief Whip as soon as possible to discuss the situation.
- (h) Ensure that, in the event that a Member is unable to meet their commitments as a Member due to personal circumstances or illness, that the Chief Whip should be notified as soon as possible.
- (i) Note that requests for Pairing should be lodged with the Chief Whip using the Requests for Pairing Form as soon as possible prior to the day when a Pair is requested. No verbal requests for Pairing can be accepted. Members are advised that a request for Pairing may not result in a Pair being given.
- (j) Recognise that Members who have been paired or given dispensation by the Chief Whip to be absent from Parliament on chamber days, must be prepared to return immediately at the Member's own expense to the Parliament on the direction of the Chief Whip.
- (k) Be required to attend all Group meetings unless prior dispensation has been granted by the Chief Whip. Accept that it is the responsibility of any Member who has prior dispensation to miss a Group meeting to make themselves aware of Group decisions on all issues prior to any meeting and to support such decisions, which have been taken.
- (l) Recognise that failure to comply with the above will result in disciplinary action being taken against the Member.

3 Leader of the Group

The Leader of the Scottish National Party shall be the Leader of the Group, unless the holder of that post is not a Member of the Scottish Parliament, in which circumstances the Group will elect its own Leader. In these latter circumstances, the Group at its first meeting will elect the Leader after the election and on an annual basis thereafter.

4 Deputy Leader of the Group

The Depute Leader of the Scottish National Party shall be the Deputy Leader of the Group, unless the holder of that post is not a Member of the Scottish Parliament, in which circumstances the Group will elect its own

Deputy Leader. In these latter circumstances, the Group at its first meeting will elect the Deputy Leader after the election and on an annual basis thereafter.

5 Group Office Bearers

5.1 On an annual basis, the Group shall elect its own Convener, Vice Convener and Secretary who will be responsible for conducting a regular meeting of the Group at which the business of the Group will be transacted and at which the Leader, Business Manager/Chief Whip and Cabinet Members will be active participants.

5.2 On an annual basis the Group will elect Members to internal organisations of the SNP as appropriate and as defined in the Constitution & Rules of the Scottish National Party.

5.3 The Group shall appoint a treasurer who shall adhere to procedures laid down in the Financial Scheme for the purpose of compliance with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

6 Group Meetings

6.1 The Group will meet on a regular basis when Parliament is in Session to—

- (a) Consider future parliamentary business and the stance to be adopted by the Group;
- (b) Hear reports from the Leader, Chief Whip and Cabinet Members;
- (c) Deal with matters of internal discipline; and
- (d) Elect nominees from the Group to stand for positions within the Parliament, such as Committee posts, chairs etc.

6.2 To ensure continuity with the SNP Groups in the European and Westminster Parliaments, Members from these Groups will be eligible to attend meetings of the Scottish Parliamentary Group on a non-voting basis and vice versa. Any other individual may be invited to attend the Group only by invitation of the Group. Non-Members attending the Group would be required to accept the constraints of confidentiality of the business that will be required of Members in that Group.

6.3 The quorum of Members required to constitute a meeting of the Group shall be 40% of Group Members.

7 Appointments by the Leader of the Group

The Leader of the Group will make the following appointments –

- (a) Cabinet Members and their specific portfolios;
- (b) Business Manager, who will also be the Chief Whip, subject to the approval of the Group;
- (c) Conveners and Deputy Conveners of Committees.

8 Appointments by the Chief Whip

8.1 The Chief Whip will make appointments to places on Committees.

8.2 Members will abide by the decision of the Chief Whip regarding placement on Committees and any changes that may be required. Attendance and contribution at Committees will be monitored and recorded by the Chief Whip.

9 Exercise of a Group Whip

9.1 All matters not designated by the Group as being free votes or matters of conscience, shall be subject to the full Group Whip. The Group will define when Members can exercise a free vote.

9.2 Matters of Conscience are matters where there is clear Party policy but also which touch on personal conscience or religious faith. Members shall be free, with the agreement of the Group, to exercise a conscience vote on such matters, provided the viewpoint is expressed with moderation and care, and acknowledgement is given to Party policy. If such a viewpoint is to be expressed it must be discussed in advance with the Chief Whip. Such areas can also include areas of vital constituency interest.

9.3 The Chief Whip must be timeously informed if an individual wishes to exercise a conscience vote and will advise the Member if consent has been granted.

10 Discipline

Principles of Disciplinary procedures –

- (a) The Chief Whip will take action in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedures Guidance Note for the Chief Whip.

- (b) The Chief Whip is responsible for monitoring breaches of Standing Orders and for the application of the disciplinary process against Members. The appropriate forms of disciplinary action shall be a verbal warning, a written warning, a final written warning, suspension or expulsion from the Group or any other disciplinary action considered appropriate.
- (c) The Chief Whip will have power to suspend a Member between scheduled meetings of the Group, and will be required to bring the case to the Group for approval at a special meeting convened for the purpose of discussing the disciplinary process.
- (d) Members may be suspended or expelled from the Group on a recommendation of the Group Convener or Chief Whip, and supported by a two-thirds majority of those attending a duly constituted meeting of the Group.
- (e) Suspension will be for a given period.
- (f) Notification of the reason for suspension or expulsion will be explained to the Member concerned by the Group Whip prior to the next scheduled meeting of the Group, at which, Members will discuss the case.
- (g) A full record of all disciplinary action against any Member will be held by the Chief Whip, including details of each charge, a note of what action was taken, and copies of any correspondence or notes detailing the outcome of disciplinary action. This record will, at the discretion of the Chief Whip, be made available to the relevant constituency or regional association of the SNP. It will also be made available to the Election Committee before consideration of any application to become an approved Scottish National Party candidate by the Member in the future.

11 Staff Relations

11.1 SNP Members will—

- (a) Treat all staff in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament.
- (b) Recognise the right of all staff to be a member of a Trade Union whether employed by the Member or the Group. Staff should be advised of this right, and a clause should be included in their Contract of Employment.

- (c) Recognise the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) as the most appropriate Trade Union for Members and staff.
- (d) Be deemed to have granted an irrevocable mandate and instructed the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to pay an equal share of the costs of employing members of Group staff for the period to and including 3 May 2007; and recognise the SPCB shall treat any sum paid under this clause as if it had been paid in satisfaction of a claim made by the Member under the Members' Allowances Scheme.
- (e) Be deemed, if the Member is returned at the general election on 3 May 2007, to have granted an irrevocable mandate and instructed the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to pay an equal share of the costs of employing members of Group staff during the period from and including 4 May 2007 to and including 31 May 2007; accept that the costs of employing a person include any costs which are incurred as a result of the termination of that person's employment (whether falling due under contract or statute) and may include redundancy payments; and recognise that the SPCB shall treat any sum paid under this clause as if it had been paid in satisfaction of a claim made by the Member under the Members' Allowances Scheme

11.2 The employer of Group staff, unless otherwise delegated, is the Leader of the Group.

11.3 Members should recognize the complexity of employment legislation and should, in the interests of common employment practice, seek the assistance of Group or Parliament staff in dealing with any staff disputes, subject to existing Trade Union involvement.

12 Approval and Amendment of Standing Orders

12.1 Any amendments to these Standing Orders will be subject to approval by National Council or National Conference. The Group will review Standing Orders after each election to the Scottish Parliament.

12.2 By signing these Standing Orders, you are accepting that you have read and understood the terms and conditions of Group membership, recognise the duties and responsibilities you have as a Scottish National Party Member of the Scottish Parliament, and accept that you are bound by its contents.

Disciplinary Procedures for SNP Parliament Group Members

Clause 1

This disciplinary procedure applies to all SNP Group Members.

Clause 2

- (a) In the event of a minor breach of Standing Orders the Group Convener and Group Whip will be responsible for any action as detailed in Clause 6 below. Any decision to invoke more serious disciplinary procedures against a Group member for breach of any clause of the Group Standing Orders must be made by two-thirds majority vote of Group members at a meeting convened for such purpose with a minimum of seven days notice being given to all members of the Group. The Group Convener or Group Whip shall be responsible for making any motion at a Group meeting on disciplinary procedures under this Clause.
- (b) After deciding to invoke the disciplinary procedure, the member concerned must be informed by the Group Convener or Group Whip which clause he/she is considered to be in breach of, what actions are deemed to constitute a breach and that a vote will be taken of all Group members to decide whether or not a breach has occurred. Only the Group Convener or Group Whip may speak to or ask any questions of the member concerned throughout the meeting.
- (c) The member concerned must be given the opportunity to explain his/her actions, to answer any questions asked and to state his/her case.
- (d) Any Group decision that a member has acted in breach of Standing Orders must be carried by a two-thirds majority.
- (e) Throughout the specially convened meeting, appropriate minutes must be taken. It must be duly recorded in the minutes the result of the vote to decide whether or not to invoke the disciplinary procedure, what clause of Standing Orders the member is considered to have acted in breach of, the actions deemed to constitute a breach, and the result of the vote to decide whether or not a breach has occurred.

Clause 3

The Group Convener and Group Whip should recommend what level of disciplinary action is considered appropriate for any breach of discipline.

Clause 4

The appropriate forms of disciplinary action shall be a verbal warning, a written warning, a final written warning, suspension or expulsion from the Group or any other disciplinary action considered appropriate.

Clause 5

Notice of any disciplinary action taken shall be notified to the National Executive Committee at the same time as the member concerned is informed, unless it is a minor breach of discipline.

Clause 6

- (a) If the breach of Standing Orders is considered to be of a minor nature, a verbal warning will be given by the Group Convener of the Group Whip, but both must be in attendance. The Group member will be left in no doubt as to the reason or grounds for the warning and the likely consequences of repetition or further disciplinary offences.
- (b) Where a verbal warning is issued it will be confirmed in writing by the Group Convener of Group Whip to the member concerned. A copy will be retained by the Group Whip for a period of one year and will be referred to in the event of a disciplinary procedure being invoked against the member in that period.
- (c) Subject to there being no further breaches of Group Standing Orders verbal warning will expire after a discipline free period of one year unless otherwise specified.

Clause 7

- (a) If the breach is considered to be a serious one, or if a further breach occurs whilst a member is subject to a current verbal warning, a written warning will usually be given. The written warning will be issued by the Group Whip. The Group member will be left in no doubt as to the reason or grounds for the warning and the likely consequences of repetition or further disciplinary offences.
- (b) A copy of the written warning will be retained by the Group Whip for a period of 24 months and will be referred to in the event of the disciplinary procedure being invoked against the member in that period.
- (c) Subject to their being no further breaches of Group Standing Orders written warnings will expire after a discipline free period of 24 months unless otherwise specified.

- (d) If it is considered appropriate to withdraw the whip for a period where this involves a Group Spokesperson, or where the member is in the Scottish Government the Group Leader will be informed. The Group Leader will consider the continued suitability of a Group member to hold a Spokesperson position or Scottish Government Office.

Clause 8

- (a) If a breach is considered sufficiently serious to warrant one written warning but is insufficiently serious to justify expulsion, or where there has been a further breach after the issue of a written warning, a final warning will normally be given. The Group member will be left in no doubt as to the reason and grounds for the warning and the likely consequences of any repetition or further disciplinary offences. The final written warning will be issued by the Group Convener of the Group Whip.
- (b) A copy of the final written warning will be retained by the Group Whip for a period of 24 months and will be referred to in the event of the disciplinary procedure being invoked against the member in that period.
- (c) Subject to there being no further breaches of Standing Orders the warning will expire after a discipline free period of 24 months unless otherwise specified.
- (d) If it is considered appropriate to suspend the Whip for a period, or expel the member, where this involves a Group Spokesperson, or where the member is in the Scottish Government the Group Leader will be informed. The Group Leader will consider the continued suitability of a Group member to hold a Spokesperson position or Scottish Government Office.

Clause 9

- (a) Where disciplinary action has previously been taken against a member and has proved ineffective, the Group may consider it appropriate to expel or suspend him/her from the Group.
- (b) In order to suspend or expel a member from the Group, a special meeting must be convened with a minimum of seven days notice being given and the reason for the meeting being advised to all members of the Group.
- (c) The decision to consider expelling or suspending a Group member must be made by two-thirds majority vote of Group members. The group members must then decide by two-thirds majority vote whether or not the member concerned has acted further in breach of any clause of the Standing Orders.

- (d) In consideration of whether or not to expel a Group member and whether or not he/she has acted further in breach of Group Standing Orders, the member concerned must be informed by the Group Convener or Group Whip which clause he/she is considered to be in breach of, what actions are deemed to constitute the breach, that a vote will be taken of all Group members to decide whether or not a breach has occurred and that a further vote will be taken if appropriate, to decide whether or not to expel a member from the Group. Only the Group Convener or Group Whip may speak to or ask questions of the member concerned throughout the meeting.
- (e) The member concerned must be given a proper and full opportunity to explain his/her case.
- (f) If the Group decided by two-thirds majority vote that a further breach of Standing Orders has occurred, the Group must then decide by two-thirds majority vote whether or not to expel the member concerned.
- (g) Throughout the specially convened meeting, appropriate minutes must be taken. It must be duly recorded in the minutes the result of the vote to decide whether or not to consider telling the member, what clause of Standing Orders the member is considered to have acted in breach of, the actions deemed to constitute the breach, the result of the vote to decide whether or not a breach has occurred and the result of the vote to decide whether or not to expel the member.
- (h) If the decision is made to expel a member from the Group, that decision together with details of the actions to be in breach of Standing Orders must be notified in writing immediately to National Executive Committee.

Clause 10

- (a) A Group member is entitled to appeal against any disciplinary action taken against him/her.
- (b) Appeals must be lodged with the Group Whip within 14 days of receipt of the letter confirming disciplinary action and must state the grounds of appeal.
- (c) Appeals will be heard by a panel comprising three people drawn from those who are Members of the National Executive Committee or Members of the European Parliament or Members of the Westminster Parliament. No MSP may be a member of the appeal panel. The appeal should normally be arranged within 21 working days of receipt of the letter of appeal. The National Executive Committee will be asked to decide the make up of the panel.

- (d) Appeals against all warning and sanctions will end at this level.
- (e) A Group member will be given written confirmation of the date and time of an appeal hearing at least seven working days in advance.

Clause 11

In the event of the Group Convener or Group Whip being the subject of disciplinary action the Group Leader will appoint another Group member to act as replacement when dealing with disciplinary action as outlined in this code.

Clause 12

The disciplinary record of all members of the Group will be supplied to the National Secretary at his/her request.

Standing Orders for the SNP Group in the United Kingdom Parliament

1 Membership of the Group

Membership of the Group will be open to approved Scottish National Party candidates at the time of their election and who accept or have accepted in writing the Standing Orders of the group. In all other cases membership shall be extended only to those members who have applied for membership and accept the aims and policy of the SNP, as well as the Standing Orders of the Group.

2 Responsibilities and Conduct of Members

2.1 Members will—

- (a) Abide by and support the SNP's policies. Group discipline and Group decisions.
- (b) Treat the position as a full-time commitment with an attendance and work rate commensurate with that status. The Chief Whip will be responsible for advising the Group if the performance of any member is inconsistent with this standard.
- (c) Adhere to the Code of Conduct for Members of the UK Parliament
- (d) Accept that no member shall within, or outwith the Parliament, publicly criticise a Group decision, policy or another member of the Group.
- (e) Accept that Members will be expected to establish a constituency office, preferably together with the local SNP MSP and to liaise with the Party organisations covering their constituency.
- (f) Recognise the importance of the group staff in providing support to the SNP Group in Parliament. All members of the Group will therefore be required to contribute equally from their Office Cost Allowance to the cost of maintaining the Group Staff, at a level set by the Group.
- (g) Adhere to all decisions taken democratically by the Group. Any Member registering their dissent at the time of the group decision must meet with the Chief Whip as soon as possible to discuss the situation.

- (h) Ensure that, in the event that a Member is unable to meet their commitments as a Member due to personal circumstances or illness, that the Chief Whip should be notified as soon as possible.
- (i) Note that if Pairing arrangements are in place, requests for Pairing should be lodged with the Chief Whip using the Requests for Pairing Form as soon as possible prior to the day when a Pair is requested. No verbal requests for Pairing can be accepted. Members are advised that a request for Pairing may not result in a Pair being given.
- (j) Recognise that members who have been paired or given dispensation by the Chief Whip to be absent from Parliament on sitting days, must be prepared to return immediately at the Members own expense to the Parliament on the direction of the Chief Whip.
- (k) Be required to attend all Group meetings unless given prior dispensation has been granted by the Chief Whip. Accept that it is the responsibility of any Member who has prior dispensation to miss a group meeting to make themselves aware of Group decisions on all decisions and to support such decisions, which have been taken.
- (l) Recognise that failure to comply with the above will result in disciplinary action being taken against the Member.

3 Leader of the Group

The Leader of the Group will be elected by the Group after the General Election and on an annual basis thereafter.

4 Deputy Leader of the Group

The Deputy Leader of the Group will be elected by the Group after the General Election and on an annual basis thereafter.

5 Group Executive

5.1 On an annual basis the group shall elect its Leader, Deputy Leader, Secretary and two further members who will form the Group Executive. The Group Executive will meet regularly when the UK Parliament is in session.

5.2 On an annual basis the group will elect members to internal organisations of the SNP as appropriate and as defined in the Constitution and Rules of the Scottish National Party.

5.3 The Group shall appoint a Treasurer who shall adhere to procedures laid down in the Financial Scheme for the purpose of compliance with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

6 Group meetings

6.1 The Group will meet on a regular basis when the UK Parliament is in session to—

- (a) Consider future parliamentary business and the stance to be adopted by the Group;
- (b) Hear reports from the Leader, Chief Whip and Group Spokespeople;
- (c) Deal with matters of internal discipline; and
- (d) Elect nominees from the Group for appropriate positions not determined by the Group Leader or Chief Whip

6.2 To ensure continuity with the SNP Groups in the Scottish and European Parliaments, members from these Groups will be eligible to attend meetings of the Westminster SNP group on a non-voting basis and vice versa. Any other individual may be invited to attend the Group only by invitation of the Group. Non-Members attending the Group would be required to accept the constraints of confidentiality of the business that will be required of members in that Group.

6.3 The Quorum of Members required to constitute a meeting of the Group shall be 40% of Group Members.

7 Appointments by the Leader of the Group

The Leader of the Group will make the following appointments—

- (a) Group Spokespeople and their specific portfolios;
- (b) Chief Whip, subject to the approval of the Group;
- (c) Chairmanship of Parliamentary Committees;
- (d) Parliamentary Posts to be nominated by the SNP

8 Appointments by the Chief Whip

- 8.1 The Chief Whip will make appointments to places on Committees.
- 8.2 Members will abide by the decision of the Chief Whip regarding placement on Committees and any changes that may be required. Attendance and contribution at Committees will be monitored and recorded by the Chief Whip.

9 Exercise of a Group Whip

- 9.1 All matters not designated by the Group as being free votes or matters of conscience, shall be subject to the full Group Whip. The Group will define when Members can exercise a free vote.
- 9.2 Matters of Conscience are matters where there is clear Party policy but also which touch on personal conscience or religious faith. Members shall be free, with the agreement of the group, to exercise a conscience vote on such matters, provided the viewpoint is expressed with moderation and care, and acknowledgement is given to Party policy. If such a viewpoint is to be expressed it must be discussed in advance with the Chief whip. Such areas can also include areas of vital constituency interest.
- 9.3 The Chief Whip must be timeously informed if an individual wishes to exercise a conscience vote and will advise the member if consent has been granted.

10 Discipline

- 10.1 Principles of Disciplinary procedures—
- 10.2 The Chief Whip will take action in accordance with the Standing Orders.
- 10.3 The Chief Whip is responsible for monitoring breaches of Standing Orders and for the application of the disciplinary process against Members. The appropriate forms of disciplinary action shall be a verbal warning, a written warning, a final written warning, suspension or expulsion from the Group or any other disciplinary action considered appropriate.
- 10.4 The Chief Whip will have power to suspend a Member between scheduled meetings of the Group, and will be required to bring the case to the Group for approval at a special meeting convened for the purpose of discussing the disciplinary process.

10.5 Members may be suspended or expelled from the Group on a recommendation of the Group Leader or Chief Whip, and supported by a two-thirds majority of those attending a duly constituted meeting of the Group.

10.6 Suspension will be for a given period.

10.7 Notification of the reason for suspension or expulsion will be explained to the Member concerned by the Group Whip prior to the next scheduled meeting of the Group, at which, Members will discuss the case.

10.8 A full record of all disciplinary action against any member will be held by the Chief Whip, including details of each charge, a note of what action was taken, and copies of any correspondence or notes detailing the outcome of disciplinary action. The record will, at the discretion of the Chief Whip, be made available to the relevant constituency association of the SNP. It will also be made available to the National Assessment Committee before consideration of any application to become an approved Scottish National Party candidate by the Member in the future.

11 Staff Relations

11.1 SNP members will—

- (a) Treat all staff in accordance with guidance by the Personnel Advice Service and Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) for members of UK Parliament.
- (b) Recognise the right of all staff to be a member of a Trade Union whether employed by the Member or the Group. Staff should be advised of this right, and a clause should be included in their Contract of Employment.

11.2 The employer of Group staff, unless otherwise delegated, is the Leader of the Group.

11.3 Members should recognise the complexity of employment legislation and should, in the interests of common employment practice, seek the assistance of Group or Parliament staff in dealing with any staff disputes, subject to existing Trade Union involvement.

12 Approval and Amendment of Standing Orders

- 12.1 Any amendments to these Standing Orders will be subject to approval by National Council or National Conference. The Group will review Standing Orders after each election to the UK Parliament.
- 12.2 By signing these Standing Orders, you are accepting that you have read and understood the terms and conditions of group membership, recognise the duties and responsibilities you have as a Scottish National Party Member of the UK Parliament, and accept that you are bound by its contents.

24. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

The object of the grievance procedure set out below is to provide a means for dealing promptly with any concern which you may have during, and connected with, your employment. It is in the best interests of all parties to try and resolve such matters as quickly as possible and as close to the point of origin as possible. This procedure does not form part of your terms and conditions of employment. The procedure complies with the ACAS Code of Practice 1 - Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures.

Raising a Complaint on an Informal Basis

Where possible, you should aim to raise any concerns or complaints you have about your work initially on an informal basis with the Chief Executive or directly with the individual who has caused you to feel concerned. This may resolve the problem quickly and preserve working relationships.

Formal Grievance Procedure

If you consider that an informal approach is not appropriate in the circumstances, or if you feel that your attempt to raise the grievance informally has not resolved your concern satisfactorily, you may wish to raise your grievance formally.

You must set out your grievance to the Chief Executive, as your employer, in writing, making clear the nature of your complaint and where applicable, detailing any attempts you have made to try to resolve the issue on an informal basis. You should also provide an indication of what outcome you wish to be achieved.

Meeting

The Chief Executive, or someone appointed by them, will invite you to attend a meeting to discuss the grievance and to try to come to a solution.

This meeting will be held within a reasonable time (and normally within 7 working days of receiving your written statement). However, the meeting may be delayed and/or a second meeting held with you, if an investigation into your complaint is required to make a reasonable response to it.

You have the right to be accompanied at this meeting by a trade union representative or colleague.

The Chief Executive will inform you of their decision verbally and this will be confirmed in writing normally within 7 working days of the meeting. If it is not possible for the Chief Executive to inform you of the decision verbally, they will write to you, normally within 7 working days of the meeting, to confirm the decision and the reasons for it.

The letter will also inform you of your right of appeal if you are not satisfied with the decision.

Appeal

If you do not consider that your grievance has been resolved satisfactorily and you wish

to appeal you should let the Chief Executive know in writing and an Appeal Manager will be nominated to consider your appeal.

If you wish to appeal, you should set out the grounds for your appeal in writing and submit it to the Appeal Manager within 7 working days of the date you were notified of the outcome of the formal grievance hearing. Your appeal must cover all the relevant issues including, if appropriate, the process followed by the Chief Executive at the first stage of the procedure.

The Appeal Manager will invite you to attend a meeting to consider the grounds of your appeal. This meeting will be held within a reasonable time (and normally within 7 working days of receiving your written statement of appeal). Again, however, the meeting may be delayed and/or a second meeting held with you, if the Appeal Manager requires to carry out any investigation into your complaint to make a reasonable response to it. You have the right to be accompanied at this meeting by a trade union representative or colleague.

Following the appeal meeting, the Appeal Manager will notify you verbally of his or her decision, which will be final. The Appeal Manager will confirm his or her decision in writing and normally within 7 working days of the meeting.

The grievance procedure is complete at this stage.

Dear Colleague,

You will be aware of ongoing media reports concerning the alleged behaviour of parliamentarians both at Westminster and Holyrood.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is wrong and will not be tolerated. In my view, those in positions of power have an even greater responsibility to lead by example and show respect for all members of staff.

I wrote to the Presiding Officer yesterday asking him to convene a cross-party meeting to review the Scottish Parliament's current arrangements and to offer recommendations on how these might be strengthened to provide reassurance for staff and all others who come into contact with Parliament. That meeting will happen later today.

At Westminster, the Speaker has made a statement and promised urgent cross-party action to improve the handling of complaints about the way MPs' staff are treated.

The SNP already have established procedures in place to ensure people can raise concerns directly and in confidence.

Today I have instructed that we put in place an additional confidential, independent route to raise concerns, ensuring women in particular have the confidence to raise any concerns.

This will be available to anyone wishing to make a complaint or allegation - or to seek advice as to whether or not they wish to pursue the matter further - can now choose to do so to someone completely outside the immediate party structure.

The person to contact is [redacted] a solicitor with Kennedys Scotland, the firm of lawyers used by the Party. [redacted] contact details are: [redacted] or [redacted]. This contact can be used by anyone.

[redacted] will report any recommendations arising from any concerns raised direct to the National Secretary.

Alternatively, individuals can report any matter on a confidential basis, either formally or informally, using existing internal procedures. The point of contact at Headquarters is [Redacted], who may be contacted at [redacted] or direct dial [redacted].

To those of you in positions of power, I urge you to take some time to reflect on your own behaviour. Read what women in particular have been saying about their experiences in the workplace and consider whether any of those instances would ever apply to your past or current behaviour.

To those of you who may have been on the receiving end of inappropriate behaviour in whatever form, I want you to know that you can feel confident coming forward at this time if that is what you choose to do. I can assure you that your concerns will be taken seriously, dealt with confidentially if that is your wish, and investigated appropriately. Of course, if you believe that you may have been the victim of a crime, you should not hesitate to go the police.

I believe that this should be a watershed moment in how we perceive and address the issues of sexual harassment and inappropriately sexualized behaviours in the workplace. Rest assured, you will be listened to. We want you to be able to raise any complaints or concerns in a confidential and sensitive way, and so I hope that the options available for doing that will provide you with a degree of comfort for what can be an incredibly difficult and daunting subject to discuss.

Regards,

Nicola Sturgeon
SNP Leader
31 October 2017