Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

The Presiding Officer
Scottish Parliament
Room CG.07
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Tel (Clerk): 0131 348 5239
By email e-mail: sppacommitee@parliament.scot

21 November 2018

Dear Ken,

Commission on Parliamentary reform recommendations on changes to the type and format of question times

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee (the Committee) has now considered the responses to its consultation on the changes to the type and format of question times and I am writing to you to confirm the decisions taken by the Committee.

Urgent Questions

The Committee has agreed to progress Standing Order rules changes to give effect to the change from “emergency” to “urgent” questions.

In addition, the Committee confirmed that the current practice whereby you had discretion to move Decision Time to accommodate urgent questions within the business programme should continue and that, where possible, urgent questions should be the first item of business. Furthermore, the Committee welcomed the Parliamentary Bureau’s commitment to take other steps to build flexibility into the business programme in order to lessen the need to move Decision Time, particularly at the last minute.

Portfolio and General Questions

The Committee would like to confirm that it considers:

- General Questions should be continued at 11:40 on Thursdays;
- That three portfolios of 20 minutes should take place each week, allowing each portfolio to be covered every three weeks;
• The additional portfolio should take place from 2:30-2:50 on Thursday afternoons as proposed by the Parliamentary Bureau;
• That the number of questions drawn for each portfolio should be reduced from ten to eight under the existing rule (with no need to suspend business if portfolios questions finish early);
• That a pilot should be initiated to establish the merit in grouping questions; and
• That portfolios should be reviewed in the future in light of the new powers deriving from the 2016 Act and the consequences of Brexit;

In addition, the Committee agreed to take forward the necessary Standing Order changes relating to the parliamentary week.

Selection of opposition spokespersons

The Committee agreed that it wished to retain the Presiding Officers’ discretion in relation to requests to speak during portfolio questions and that the guidance should be updated to reflect current practice.

Yours sincerely

Bill Kidd MSP
Convener
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee