



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

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Proposal for a Bill to amend the Scotland Act to transfer responsibility for the arrangements for financial assistance to non-Government political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament from Scottish Ministers to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

1. The Parliament's Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee would like your views on its intention to introduce a Committee Bill which will transfer responsibility for the arrangements for financial assistance to non-Government political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament from Scottish Ministers to Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB).

Current arrangements

2. The mechanism for the provision of funding to opposition parties is governed by the Scotland Act 1998, which allows for an Order in Council to provide for the payment of money to non-Government parties – so-called “Short money”, named after Edward Short (later Lord Glenamara), the former Leader of the House of Commons.

3. Accordingly, an [Order](#) was made in 1999 and has governed the arrangements since the creation of the Parliament. It was prepared jointly by the United Kingdom Government and the then Scottish Executive in 1999, but the Scotland Act 2016, in changing the procedural requirements, removed the UK Government's role, leaving the Scottish Ministers solely responsible for submitting draft Orders to Her Majesty.

4. The current Order specifies a sum of money to be paid by the Scottish Parliament's Corporate Body to political parties, for each MSP, as a maximum

reimbursement for expenses incurred in performing their parliamentary duties. This sum (the “relevant amount”) has been updated annually in line with the retail prices index. In the 2017-18 period, it was £8,224.68. The Scottish Parliament’s [website](#) records the amounts paid to each eligible party each year. Payments are made on the basis of claims submitted by each party.

Proposed change

5. While the Scotland Act 2016 removed the UK Government’s role in the process, leaving the order making power with the Scottish Ministers, the funding is in fact provided by the Scottish Parliament’s Corporate Body from its budget. The Corporate Body is, therefore, arguably best placed to oversee any future arrangements, as it does with the administration of Members’ salaries and the reimbursement of expenses schemes – matters which are also governed by the Scotland Act.

6. It could be argued that the Scottish Government, as the party or parties of power, is not ideally placed to determine the funding of non-Government political parties. The Parliament’s Corporate Body, by contrast, consists of representatives elected by all MSPs and acts in a politically neutral manner. As such it is better placed to take decisions, and promote actions, in respect of the funding of opposition parties.

7. Before he referred this matter to the Bureau, The Presiding Officer sought the view of the Scottish Government, which has indicated that it is content that the administration of these provisions be transferred to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

8. The Committee envisages a Bill which is narrow in scope – i.e. that it will only transfer responsibility for making the arrangements from Scottish Ministers to the Corporate Body. The Committee is clear that the Bill will not seek to make changes to the existing scheme or the formula which is applied for the disbursement of funds.

9. To reiterate, the proposed Bill will not itself affect the amount paid to parties. It will remove responsibility for the content of the “Short Money” arrangements from Scottish Ministers and place it with the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. It is envisaged that Short Money arrangements will, thereafter, be set by Parliamentary resolution rather than by Order in Council. The SPCB would be required to consult on any changes to the existing arrangements and formal approval would be required by the Parliament as a whole.

10. The Committee is seeking the views of the SPCB, MSPs, political parties, the Scottish Government and the Electoral Commission [adjust according to those agreed]. You are invited to respond by Friday 1st November 2019 by sending a written submission to the Committee by email to sppa.committee@parliament.scot. If you have any queries about the proposal, please contact the clerks to the Committee using the contact details above.

I look forward to receiving and considering your written responses.

Yours sincerely,

Bill Kidd MSP
Convener
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee