Official Report
Aithisg Oifigeil

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Comataidh nan Inbhean, Dòighean-obrach agus Cur-an-dreuchd Poblach

Thursday 10 September 2026

Session 7

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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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CONTENTS

	Col.
INTERESTS	1
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
CROSS-PARTY GROUP	2

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
2nd Meeting 2026, Session 7

CONVENER

*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
*Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
*Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

LOCATION

The Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 10 September 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:10]

Interests

The Convener (Jenni Minto): Good morning, and welcome to the second meeting of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in 2026.

I welcome Steven Bonnar to the committee. I thank David Linden for his short but impactful membership of the committee and wish him well as he takes on the convenership of the Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee.

I invite Steven to declare any relevant interests.

Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Thank you for that warm welcome. I have no relevant interests to declare.

The Convener: Thank you. I take the opportunity to remind all members of the ongoing requirement to make declarations of interest in relation to any specific future item of business when it seems necessary to make such a declaration.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:11

The Convener: Our second agenda item is a decision on whether to consider agenda item 5, on our work programme, in private. Are we all agreed to do so?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Cross-Party Group

09:11

The Convener: We move swiftly to the next agenda item, which is the first this session dealing with the recognition of cross-party groups—CPGs—and deals specifically with the reregistration of CPGs from last session. A sift process, as set out in the members' code of conduct, deals with how CPGs from the previous session can be reregistered for this session. That process is conducted jointly by me, in my capacity as convener, and the clerks. If we are satisfied that CPGs are fully compliant with the rules, they can reregister.

I am pleased to confirm to members that a number of CPGs have come through the sift process and are now reregistered. Those are the groups dealing with armed forces and veterans, beer and pubs, housing, India, and Ukraine.

Today, we will briefly take evidence from Clare Adamson MSP, who is the proposed convener of the CPG on science and technology. That CPG was not compliant with the code at the end of session 6, because the group held its annual general meeting late and because its annual return was not submitted on time. Our predecessor committee agreed during session 6 that any CPG that had not held an AGM or had not submitted an annual return, or that had been late in doing so, should be referred to the committee if the group sought to be reregistered for session 7. The CPG on science and technology sought reregistration for this session, and an item in members' papers explains the code of conduct breaches, one of which was not notifying the clerk of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee at least 10 calendar days before the committee's initial meeting was held, on 23 June. That was a breach of paragraph 6.30 of the code.

The main issue to highlight today is the administrative difficulties with the CPG. Clare, I am glad that you accepted our invitation and I am pleased to welcome you here. I will ask one question before opening the meeting up to members. I would welcome any observations you might have about issues with the CPG and its compliance with the code, both towards the end of session 6 and at the beginning of this session. How do you plan to address those issues?

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): There were major changes to the operation of CPGs as a result the work done by this committee, and I am supportive of that.

I have a few observations. We have been told that we held our AGM late, but our AGMs were dated 29 October 2024 and 12 November 2025.

We were scheduled to have an AGM in September, as usual, but, due to late sittings of Parliament last session, which I am sure members remember well, we had to postpone that meeting. It was rescheduled to take place as soon as possible, in November, which still fell within 12 months of the previous AGM. To hold us to such a tight definition of what counts as being late is unfortunate.

09:15

Obviously, lots of us lose staff at the end of the parliamentary session, because people move on to new jobs. That happened in my own office. I had relatively new members of staff dealing with the CPG at the time, and the person with the key secretariat role of looking after the CPG, which has been going since 1999, left the organisation. It was just a mix-up in communication. That person said that they had complied with everything that they needed to do in the handover, but they had not submitted the form—although it had been ratified, signed and completed at the November meeting. It was only due to those circumstances that the annual return was not submitted on time, and I apologise for that.

I was written to, as the convener, but I was a co-convener—we have co-conveners on cross-party groups—and I am not aware that the other co-conveners were written to at the time. It was primarily my office that organised the meetings, but we need a discussion among ourselves about what co-convenership means in terms of responsibility and whether the letter should have gone to all the co-conveners at the time.

We are very aware of the changes to standing orders, which, as always, are technical in nature. At the end of the previous session, a document was produced on the changes for cross-party groups, but my staff were not aware of that because they were not in post when it was sent round the Parliament. I appreciate that that document provides very comprehensive advice, but I wonder how many other offices are fully aware of the document and the impact on cross-party groups. I was aware that we had to get the cross-party groups up and running as quickly as possible, so we scheduled the meeting at the time.

Another practical consideration is that, in the past, I have attended many CPGs that have not been quorate or met the standards for a CPG meeting. Since the introduction of hybrid work, we have always had a hybrid meeting. In the past, we have gone ahead with the meeting and then had it ratified via a Teams meeting at a later date. When we were advised not to go ahead because we had missed the notification deadline by, I believe, three days, because we notified in 10 days, not seven—again, I apologise for the mistake—we went ahead on the basis that the decisions that had been made would be ratified at a later Teams meeting that would have been quorate and met the requirements for a meeting of the Parliament.

Convener, it is up to you and the rest of the committee to decide whether that is an appropriate action for groups to take in the future. It was standard practice until the new rules were introduced.

The Convener: Thanks very much, Clare. That is a helpful note about the importance, when procedures change, of ensuring that the information is circulated widely and appropriately. I completely understand your comments about chamber times, because those changed quite a lot at the end of the previous parliamentary session.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Welcome to the committee, Clare. I have one quick question. We should acknowledge that the secretariat is external and staffed by volunteers, so there is a responsibility on MSPs' offices to ensure that they are supported. What learning would you take from your experience, and how would you ensure that your office is all over this in the future?

Clare Adamson: My office has generally been very good in this area. In fact, another CPG has been held up as an exemplar of how we should do things and its final annual report always includes a survey of members with regard to the influence of the CPG—I absolutely get that. The secretariat is really important, and we rely on third sector organisations and other professional organisations to carry out that role. In this instance, it was just a case of unfortunate misinformation in the handover. In the future, we would use a checklist of what is required and absolutely chase the annual return to ensure that it had gone through.

It is frustrating, as my office actually has a checklist of things to do for all events and CPG meetings that we hold in the Parliament. I think that members should have a checklist from the clerks, because the code of conduct is a technical document, but the requirements that have to be met are actually very simple. In the future, having a checklist to give to the offices that are organising the meetings, and to the conveners, would be helpful and would probably avoid the omissions that we have had in this situation.

There are a few points to make. It is a big change. The clerks commented that, when we submitted the return, we had verbatim minutes. We do not have verbatim minutes. That would be the easiest thing to do—as I said, our meetings are hybrid, so we could just dump a transcript—but that is not what we do. We have detailed minutes, and the CPG members rely on those to find out what happened at the meeting, and we know that they are of value to our members.

If the clerks need specific information on decisions that have been taken or any financial information, we can provide that as an addendum. I stress, however, that none of the CPGs in which I am involved usually have financial returns; we rely on the members to contribute voluntarily for things like teas and coffees, so we do not have a treasurer in that respect. In my view, CPG minutes are for the members, and we would like to continue to have them detailed but not verbatim.

The Convener: Great. Thank you.

Clare Adamson: There is one other point. We did try to comply, but the matter was dealt with by a new staff member. Paragraph B, on reregistration, sits between paragraphs A and C. I appreciate that those other two paragraphs both refer to the requirement for a 10-day notification period, but the paragraph on reregistration does not mention that. My staff were confused; they did not think, therefore, that the 10-day notification requirement was relevant to that paragraph. That could be looked at in standing orders.

The Convener: You have made some helpful observations, and I and the committee can certainly take those away to ensure that there is clarity. I appreciate your honesty about the way that you feel, and I think that there are learnings not only from your side but as to how we implement the new procedures.

As there are no further questions for Clare Adamson, I thank her for joining us.

We move to the next item of business, for which we are still in public session. Item 4 is a decision on whether to recognise the proposed cross-party group on science and technology. For this part of our deliberations, I refer members to paragraph 8 of the clerk's paper, which sets out three options for us to consider. On whether to recognise the CPG, we have, in effect, to make a binary decision: yes or no. However, as per the clerk's note, we could grant recognition but with conditions. For example, if any non-compliance by the CPG is noticed over the next six to 12 months, we could withdraw its recognition.

It might be helpful to clarify that, if we go down that route and there is a breach, loss of recognition would not be automatic—it would still require a decision from us. However, we would have made a public statement of intent in advance.

Do members have any comments?

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): I just want to say that there were genuine efforts made to comply in the previous session. What happened involved quite minor points of oversight, so I would not have a problem with according the CPG recognition.

Steven Bonnar: Ms Adamson has given transparent answers regarding the issues that were faced in the previous session with late sittings. Some of the administrative errors may be an oversight, and the requirements will clearly be implemented if recognition is granted for this session. Like Mr Simpson, I would, therefore, be minded to accord recognition.

Jackie Baillie: I am happy to agree to that. Clare Adamson has made some helpful suggestions about producing a checklist. If that could be done, it would probably assist parliamentary staff immensely.

The Convener: I absolutely agree. Given the volume of new members that we have, it would help them, too. Thank you for that.

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I agree with what has been said.

The Convener: Unanimously, we agree that recognition should be granted to the cross-party group on science and technology for this session of Parliament.

I thank you all. That concludes our business in public, and we move into private session.

09:25

Meeting continued in private until 10:13.

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