

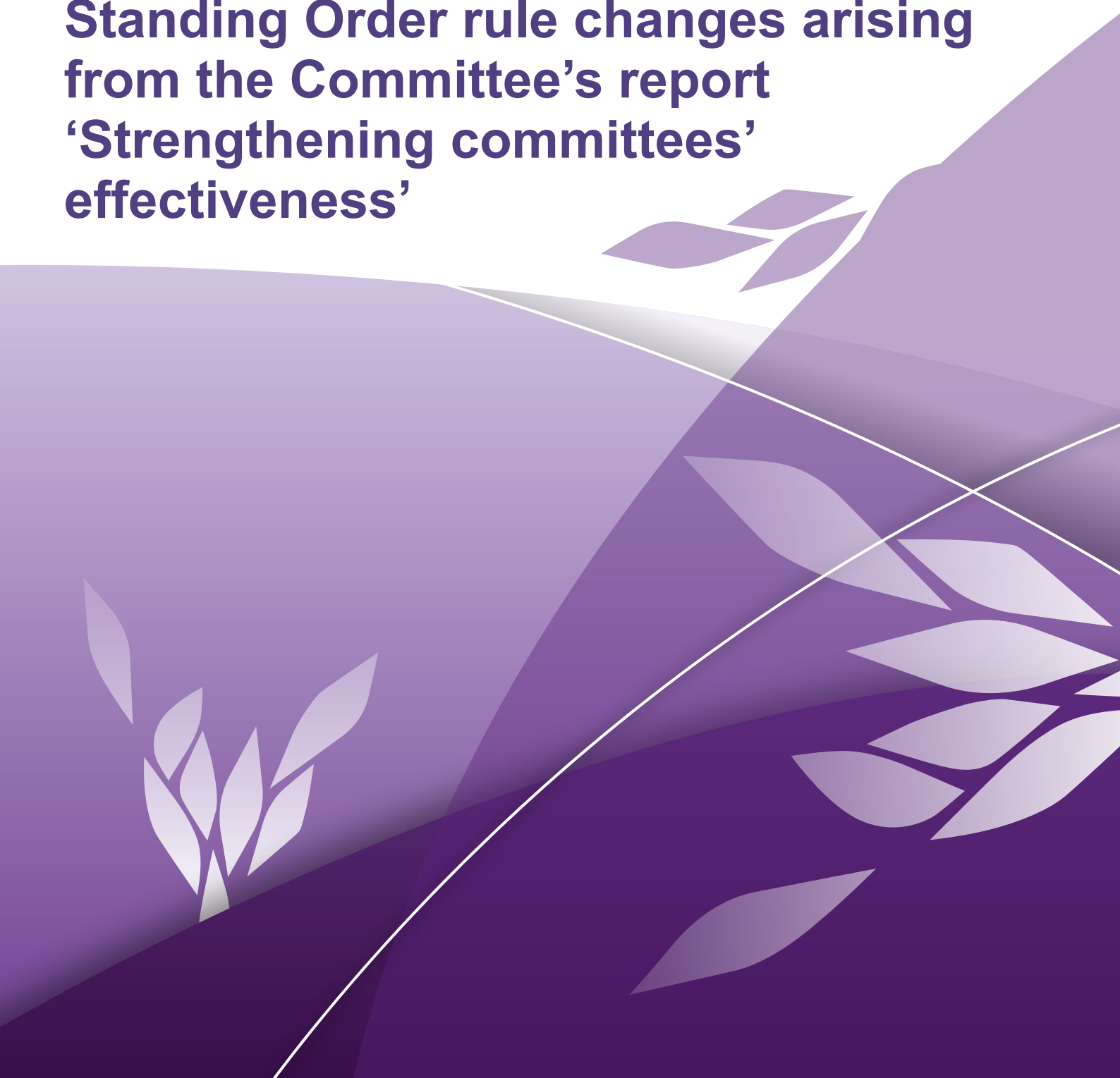


The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Published 27 January 2026
SP Paper 977
3rd Report, 2026 (Session 6)

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Standing Order rule changes arising from the Committee's report 'Strengthening committees' effectiveness'



Published in Scotland by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

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For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:
Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: info@parliament.scot

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Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

- (a) the practice and procedures of the Parliament in relation to its business;
- (b) whether a member's conduct is in accordance with these Rules and any Code of Conduct for members, matters relating to members interests, and any other matters relating to the conduct of members in carrying out their Parliamentary duties;
- (c) the adoption, amendment and application of any Code of Conduct for members;
- (d) matters relating to public appointments in Scotland;
- (e) matters relating to the regulation of lobbying; and
- (f) matters falling within the responsibility of the Minister for Parliamentary Business.

2. Where the Committee considers it appropriate, it may by motion recommend that a member's rights and privileges be withdrawn to such extent and for such period as are specified in the motion."



SPPA.Committee@parliament.scot



0131 348 5176

Committee Membership



Convener
Martin Whitfield
Scottish Labour



Deputy Convener
Ruth Maguire
Scottish National Party



Emma Roddick
Scottish National Party



Annie Wells
Scottish Conservative
and Unionist Party



Sue Webber
Scottish Conservative
and Unionist Party

Background

1. The Committee published its report [Strengthening committees' effectiveness](#) ["inquiry report"] on 2 October 2025.
2. The report provides a comprehensive set of recommendations to reform and renew the work of committees. The Committee's recommendations cover a wider range of themes and issues including:
 - The role of Committee members in promoting effective working on committees, including the importance of collegiate working; training and support for committee members; and committees having a common purpose
 - The size of committees and whether there is an optimum size of a committee to aid committee effectiveness
 - Gender balance on committees and how this might be supported and achieved
 - The role of conveners in promoting committee effectiveness including the potential merits of having elected conveners
 - The capacity of committees within their workload to engage in good scrutiny work, including changes to the structures and remits of committees
 - The role committee stakeholders and the public can play in helping to ensure that committees deliver effective scrutiny
 - How the effectiveness of committees might be evaluated
3. The Parliament noted and welcomed the conclusions and recommendations in the report in the Committee's chamber debate held on 6 November 2025.

Committee proposals

4. This report sets out the Committee's recommendations for draft standing order rule changes following the recommendations in the Committee's inquiry report. This report can be read in conjunction with the inquiry report which sets out further reasoning for the Committee's recommendations.
5. Suggested rule changes related to some other aspects of the inquiry report including those regarding elected conveners will be published by the committee in due course.
6. We propose that the standing order rule changes, detailed in this report, take effect from the start of the next parliamentary session.
7. Information about the proposed rule changes is set out below.

Committee Annual Reports

8. In the inquiry report, we recommend that Standing Orders is amended to place a requirement in a committee's annual report to set out how effectively the committee has conducted its scrutiny and what this has achieved. This approach will encourage accountability and allow committees collectively to learn from each other and informal approaches to future work.
9. Standing Orders Rule 12.9 Annual Reports sets out the current requirements for Committee annual reports. The proposed rule change recommends inserting into this rule the additional requirements, to report on how effectively a committee has conducted its scrutiny and what this has achieved.
10. Further internal guidance, drafted by Clerks, is currently provided to committees which sets out the specifics of what annual reports should contain. The Committee expects that this guidance will be updated to incorporate further details on what this new provision for the annual reports will require in practice.

Size of Committees

11. The inquiry report recommended that a change is made to Standing Orders to reduce the maximum number of members for subject and mandatory committees down from fifteen to ten members. We also recommended that committees should normally have a maximum of seven members.
12. Standing Orders Rule 6.3.2 Membership of committees sets out the current requirements that committees shall have at least 5 but not more than 15 members. The proposed rule change recommends reducing the maximum number of members to not more than 10.

Gender balance on Committees

13. As part of the inquiry, we considered recommendations made by the Gender Sensitive Audit in relation to gender balance on committees. We had committed, as a minimum step, to recommend that changes are made to Standing Orders so that next session there are no single-sex committees.
14. We also considered whether Standing Orders could go further and make more definitive prescription about the gender balance on committees relative to the gender balance of the Parliament as a whole. We concluded that this should not be specified in Standing Orders as an absolute requirement, but that committee membership should normally reflect the gender balance of the Parliament as a whole. As explained in the inquiry report, we consider the use of the word “normally” means this approach is a realistic proposition which allows the Bureau to reflect the gender composition of the parliament that has been elected, therefore taking into account the practical context for delivery.
15. Standing Orders Rule 6.3.4 sets out the current requirements that the Parliamentary Bureau shall have regard to when proposing a member to be a committee member. The proposed rule change recommends that in proposing a member to be a committee member the Parliamentary Bureau must ensure that, in so doing, the result would not be that all members of a committee would be of the same sex.
16. The Committee also recommends inserting an additional requirement in Standing Orders Rule 6.3.4. to give effect to the inquiry report recommendation regarding gender balance of committees when a committee is established.

Members' Bills introduction date

17. Standing Orders Rule 9.14 sets out the current deadlines for introduction of Members' Bills. These are the first sitting day in June in the calendar year preceding a general election or, exceptionally and with the consent of the Parliamentary Bureau, the until the last sitting day in September in that year.
18. In relation to capacity for scrutiny of Members' Bills, we recommended that the deadline for introduction of such Bills should be moved from the first sitting day in June in the calendar year proceeding a general election to the first sitting day in December in the third year of a parliamentary session. Whilst this reduces the time for Members to introduce their own legislation, we consider that this could potentially reduce some of the pressure of legislation on committees in the final part of the parliamentary session as it would bring forward committee consideration of members bills.
19. The approach proposed would mean any future changes to the length of a parliamentary term would not require this rule to be amended further, as it would still provide the same time between the last date a bill could be introduced and the end of the session.
20. The proposed rule change also retains the provision that currently allows a Member's Bill, exceptionally and with the consent of the Parliamentary Bureau, to be introduced up to the last sitting day in March in the year preceding a general election.

Committees meeting in private at the same time as the Chamber

21. Standing Orders Rule 12.3.3B currently sets out that a meeting of a committee may only be held when a meeting of the Parliament is in progress if the Parliament so decides on a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau. In the inquiry report we recommended that more time is allocated in the parliamentary week to committees. We heard a strong push from political parties that they would be supportive of this approach and that the value and merit of the work of committees justified this prioritisation.
22. We therefore recommend that Standing Orders are changed so that committees are allowed to meet in private session at the same time as the Chamber is sitting, except when considering Stage 3 of a Bill, the final stage of a private bill or where there is a meeting of a Committee of the Whole Parliament. The process for committees seeking to meet in public when a meeting of the Parliament is in progress would remain the same as it is at present.

People's panel debates

23. In its report on a [blueprint for participation](#), the Citizen Participation and Petitions Committee recommended that deliberative democracy, and specifically the use of People's Panels, be embedded in the work of committees. We considered this in the context of our inquiry and have recommended that provision should be made in Standing Orders for a Chamber debate to be held following the conclusion of a People's Panel. We also recognised and supported the Citizen Participation and Petitions Committee's recommendation that People's Panels be part of a wider package of participation approaches used by committees.
24. Standing Orders Rule 5.6 provides that, in proposing the business programme, the Parliamentary Bureau shall ensure that time is available for particular special cases of Parliamentary business.
25. The Committee recommends inserting the requirement for a dedicated Committee debate slot following a People's Panel into Standing Order Rule 5.6.

Quorum for joint meetings of committees

26. In evidence submitted to the inquiry, the issue of the quorum requirements for joint meetings of committee was raised as a potential issue. We noted this and considered whether more flexibility could be provided in Standing Orders. We recommend that changes are made to Standing Orders to reduce the number of members who are required to be present from each individual committee when hosting a joint committee meeting. This change will assist in encouraging more committees to consider using joint committee meetings in the future.
27. The Committee recommends inserting an additional requirement in Rule 12.2 so that in the case of two or more committees meeting jointly the number of committee members present from each committee is required to be no fewer than 2 rather than the current requirement of 3; and that the total number of members present at a joint meeting cannot be fewer than 4.

Hosting Members

28. During the inquiry we also heard that other legislatures have a mechanism for 'hosting' members. Under this approach, Members from one committee attend another committee's meetings and are granted similar permissions to the members of the committee they are being hosted with. We are attracted to this proposal as an additional tool for flexible working to be added to those currently available to our committees.
29. We recommended that a mechanism for hosting is placed in Standing Orders to offer another way for committees to work together and ensure work is not being siloed. It enhances the current Reporter approach where a member with the agreement of the other committee's convener can participate in other committee's proceedings. A hosting mechanism would mean that a member would have new enhanced rights to access private sessions of the other committee and private meeting papers, but they would not have the right to vote.
30. The Committee recommends inserting a new rule to provide for visiting committee members in Chapter 6 of Standing Orders.

Conclusion

31. The Committee recommends to the Parliament the Standing Order rule changes at Annexe A to this report.

Annex A - Proposed Standing Order Rule changes

Rule 5.6 Special cases of Parliamentary business

After Rule 5.6.1(b), insert—

(ba) on 2 half sittings days in each Parliamentary year, priority is given to debate a report of a People's Panel

Rule 6. 3 Membership of committees

In Rule 6.3.2, delete "15" and replace with "10"

After 6.3.4, insert—

"6.3.4A

In proposing a member to be a committee member under Rule 6.3.4, the Parliamentary Bureau must ensure that, in so doing, the result would not be that all members of a committee would be of the same sex."

6.3.4B

When a committee is first established, the Parliamentary Bureau shall normally ensure that the proposed membership reflects the gender balance of the Parliament. Where a proposed membership does not do so, the member of the Parliamentary Bureau moving the motion shall explain the reasons for this."

New rule: Rule 6. 3C Visiting committee members

After Rule 6.3B, insert:

"Rule 6.3C Visiting committee members

1. A committee may decide that a member of another committee be invited to participate in a committee meeting as a visiting committee member in relation to a specified item of business, including in any consideration of the specified item of business that is taken in private under Rule 12.3.5.
2. A decision under paragraph 1 must be made unanimously and must be communicated in writing to the visiting committee member and published.
3. A visiting committee member shall not be regarded as a committee member for the purposes of these rules."

Rule 9.14 Members' Bills

In rule 9.14.15 delete—

"June (or, exceptionally, with the consent of the Parliamentary Bureau until the last sitting day in September) in the calendar year preceding that in which the next ordinary Scottish

Parliament general election is due to be held.”

And replace with—

“December two calendar years before the calendar year in which the next ordinary Scottish Parliament general election is due to be held or exceptionally, with the consent of the Parliamentary Bureau, until the last sitting day in March in the calendar year preceding that in which the next ordinary Scottish Parliamentary general election is due to be held.”

Rule 12.2 Procedure in committee

In Rule 12.2.1, after “not” insert “, subject to paragraph 1A,”

After Rule 12.2.1, insert new paragraph 12.2.1A—

1A. In the case of two or more committees meeting to consider a matter jointly under Rule 6.14, consideration of business or voting shall not commence if-

(a) the number of committee members present is fewer than 2 from each committee; and

(b) the total number of members present is fewer than 4.

Rule 12.3 Committee meetings

Delete Rule 12.3.3B and replace with—

“A meeting of a committee may be held when a meeting of the Parliament is in progress if:

(a) the Parliament so decides on a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau; or

(b) the Committee is meeting to consider business in private following a decision under paragraph 5 but not where the business being considered at the meeting of the Parliament is business under Rules 9.8, 9A.10, 9C.12 or where there is a meeting of a Committee of the Whole Parliament.”

Rule 12.9 Annual Reports:

After “and how the committee has taken account of equal opportunities in its work.” insert “The report must also set out how effectively the committee considers it has conducted its scrutiny function and what the outcomes have been of that scrutiny.”

