

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Tuesday 23 June 2026
1st Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Committee Effectiveness

Purpose of paper

1. In Session 6 the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments (SPPA) Committee undertook an inquiry on [Strengthening committees' effectiveness](#). The objective of the inquiry was to ensure committees are well placed to operate effectively in the new parliamentary session and beyond.
2. This paper invites the Committee to reflect on issues relating to committee effectiveness, drawing on the findings of that inquiry. The initial discussion is intended to inform preparation for business planning.
3. Members will have further opportunity to consider these issues in more depth, agree strategic objectives and priorities, approaches to working practices and engagement.

Committee effectiveness

4. Key themes considered by the SPPA inquiry on Strengthening committees' effectiveness were:
 - 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.
 - 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.
5. A SPICe summary of the key findings and recommendations of the report is included in Annexe A.
6. Based on these recommendations, a framework for considering committee effectiveness and impact is set out in Annexe B. This is intended to support

committees in reflecting on how they plan, prioritise and deliver their work, including what they are trying to achieve, how they will work together, and how they will demonstrate their impact.

Action

- 7. The Committee is invited to note the report findings and recommendations and share any initial reflections. This is intended to inform preparation for business planning.**

**Clerks to the Committee
June 2026**

Annex A: SPICe summary of the Session 6 Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments (SPPA) Committee inquiry on Strengthening committees' effectiveness

Key findings and recommendations

The Session 6 Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee published its [report on Strengthening Committees' Effectiveness](#) on 12 October 2025. The key findings and recommendations are summarised below. Action taken through changes to Standing Orders is noted after this summary.

The culture of committees and the role of membership

The Committee heard that the culture of committees was crucial to their success. As a result, the Committee felt it was important to recognise that a committee is more effective when it works together, has a clear purpose and aims, listens and reflects on the evidence it has received, and comes to a collective agreement on an issue. It agreed that there was merit to committee members leaving their party responsibilities at the door, but noted that this was not always appropriate or desirable.

Recommendations aimed to support reflection on evidence, by amending Standing Orders 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, and by suggesting that each committee sets objectives for the individual pieces of scrutiny and inquiry work it conducts.

The support and training offered to MSPs in their role as committee members

The Committee noted that an important foundation for a committee to operate effectively is the knowledge and skills of its members. It agreed that with the necessary support, knowledge and skills needed in their role, committee members will perform with confidence and ability. They will also be more likely to operate collegiately. To support this, the Committee emphasised the importance of a well-resourced committee support service and of committees agreeing their preferred approaches to briefing materials. It also recognised the value in committees drawing on external expertise.

The Committee expressed support for planned induction activities for new MSPs, and suggested that initial meeting slots should place an emphasis on learning, skills development and relationship building. As part of this training, the Committee recommended that members should consider and discuss what an effective committee looked like to them. The Committee also emphasised the importance of informal fact-finding sessions and away days in developing the knowledge and relationships within committees.

Size and composition of Committees

The Committee reflected on evidence received on committee culture, membership turnover and operation in the context of committee size. It supported concerns raised around the impact on members of sitting on multiple committees, and on the practical management of meetings. The Committee proposed that Standing Orders be amended so that committees could have a maximum size of 10 members (down from 15), and should normally have 7 members, but that flexibility in size be retained to allow representation of smaller parties as needed.

The Committee supported aspirations towards having gender balanced committees but also recognised the potential for a disproportionate burden to be placed on female MSPs. As a result, it recommended that when committees are established a requirement is placed on the Parliamentary Bureau for their proposals for members of each committee to normally reflect the gender balance of the whole Parliament. It proposed that where committee membership does not achieve gender balance, the Bureau include a statement explaining the reason for this.

Role of convener

The Committee explored the role of conveners in the culture and effective operation of committees and looked at examples of models of both election and remuneration of committee chairs from other legislatures.

The Committee highlighted the role of convener in fostering a collegiate atmosphere and a sense of independence from the Scottish Government, supporting committees to effectively deliver their scrutiny function. It recommended a programme of training and development support for conveners be put in place at the start of Session 7. It also recommended that the Parliament consider implementing a process for electing conveners in Session 7, to be reviewed at the end of the session. It did not consider that a case for remuneration of conveners had been made.

Capacity and workload of committees

The committee considered options to mitigate against past challenges such as heavy workloads (particularly around referred legislation), and limited capacity within committees to exercise the full range of their functions. The Committee recommended that Standing Orders be changed to bring forward the deadline for the introduction of members' bills. It also suggested that, given the potential for a higher legislative burden in the latter half of the session, plan inquiry and post-legislative scrutiny work for earlier in the session.

The Committee also recommended that Committees be allowed to meet in private at the same time as the Chamber, and that the Bureau consider recommending to the Parliament the formation of time-limited committees in order to better manage peaks and troughs in the legislative programme more effectively.

Committees' relationship with stakeholders and the public

The Committee acknowledged the importance of ensuring a wide range of expert witnesses and views and perspectives are heard and committees go beyond the 'usual suspects', and as a result recommended that the Conveners Group should

monitor the range of committees' witness bases to ensure committees hear from all relevant voices

The Committee also lent support to efforts to support public participation in the work of committees, and recommended that Standing Orders is updated to provide for an additional dedicated Committee debate slot following a People's Panel, as recommended by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee in its Blueprint for Participation.

Novel ways of working

The Committee explored different tools and ways of working, and noted that there were already many options available to committees. It highlighted approaches which did not require rule changes, but were potentially underused, such as the use of reporters, sub-committees and joint committee meetings. The Committee emphasised that conveners and committees should be made aware of these options, and consideration of their usage, merits and limitations should be built into work programme discussions.

The Committee recommended that changes be 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, to allow more flexibility and encourage use of the approach. It also recommended that a mechanism for hosting is placed in Standing Orders, which would mean that non-committee members could have access to private papers and private discussions, but would not have the right to vote. It stated that 'hosting' offers another way for committees to work together and ensure work is not being siloed.

Evaluating performance

Finally, the Committee emphasised the importance of committees evaluating their performance, which could be supported by having clear, specific and measurable recommendations, and understanding the range of impact that committee work might have.

Subsequent changes to Standing Orders

Several recommendations made by the Committee proposed changes to Standing Orders, which the Committee undertook further work and reported on separately before taking proposals to the Chamber. All of these were accepted, and detail of the changes can be found in the relevant reports:

Changes on annual reports, size of committees, gender balance on committees, members' bills introduction date, committees meeting in private at the same time as the Chamber, people's panel debates, quorum for joint hosting of committees, and hosting members - [Standing Order rule changes arising from the Committee's report 'Strengthening committees' effectiveness' | Scottish Parliament.](#)

Election of conveners - [Standing Orders rule changes - Elected Conveners | Scottish Parliament.](#)

Annex B: Framework for considering committee effectiveness and impact

| Area | Key questions for members |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Purpose | <p>What difference do we want to make?</p> <p>What are we here to achieve this session?</p> |
| Impact | <p>What type of impact are we trying to achieve (for example, influencing policy, raising awareness, enabling people to share views, or checking progress on delivery)?</p> <p>How will we know if our work has made a difference?</p> <p>How will we evidence what we have achieved?</p> |
| Priorities | <p>What really matters for us to focus on (for example, key policy issues, ways of working, or a combination of both?)</p> <p>Are we trying to do too much?</p> <p>What should we not be doing?</p> |
| How we work together | <p>What kind of committee do we want to be?</p> <p>How will we work constructively across parties?</p> <p>How do we make sure we follow the evidence?</p> |
| Time and focus | <p>How will we use our limited time best?</p> <p>Are we leaving enough space to respond to new or urgent issues?</p> |
| Approach to scrutiny | <p>How will we decide which issues to focus on?</p> <p>Where are there opportunities to have the greatest impact or make a difference?</p> <p>Where is there the greatest public or stakeholder interest?</p> |
| Learning and development | <p>What do we need, as a group, to work well together?</p> <p>How will we build trust and shared understanding?</p> |
| Engagement | <p>Who do we need to hear from?</p> <p>Are we hearing from the right people - including those less often heard?</p> <p>How do we involve the public meaningfully?</p> |
| Evidence | <p>Are we asking the right questions to get the evidence we need?</p> <p>How are we using and reflecting on the evidence throughout our work?</p> |
| Working with others | <p>Do we need to work with other committees to do this well?</p> <p>How do we avoid working in silos?</p> |