

Presiding Officer's Guidance on Conduct in the Chamber

Introduction

1. On 19 June, the Presiding Officer wrote to this Committee (see **Annexe A**) about his [new guidance on conduct during Chamber business](#) ("the PO's Guidance").
2. Under Rule 6.4 of Standing Orders, this Committee has the responsibility to oversee the "adoption, amendment and application of any Code of Conduct for members". This includes agreeing any changes to documents such as the [Guidance on the Code of Conduct for MSPs](#) ('guidance on the Code'), of which the Committee is the custodian.
3. In section 7 of the Code of Conduct, which covers the general conduct of MSPs, it is expressly provided (at 7.11) that "Members must abide by the guidance issued by the Presiding Officer on members' conduct in the Chamber...".
4. Section 7 of the Guidance on the Code refers to the PO's Guidance. The PO asks the Committee in his letter to "consider how best to revise the Guidance on the Code of Conduct to reflect the new Guidance I have issued".

Proposed changes and decision

5. In the present instance, the Committee's role is limited. The PO has issued his Guidance and the Committee has no formal role in approving it. (But the rules around conduct in the Chamber are within the general remit of the Committee and it could agree to look at these in future, if it so wished.) The Committee has a role in ensuring its own Guidance on the Code is kept up to date, so that Members and others can rely on it. The Committee could do this by either—
6. Following current practice by extract and precisising the main aspects of the PO's Guidance within the Guidance on the Code (see **Annexe B**); or
7. Letting the PO's Guidance speak for itself and simply providing a hyperlink to it in the Guidance on the Code (**Annexe C**). This would be in recognition of changing internet browsing habits, with the Guidance on the Code originating in the early days of the Parliament.
8. **The Committee is invited to note the new PO's Guidance and decide which of the two suggested options for updating its own Guidance it prefers.**

Annexe A: correspondence from the Presiding Officer, Kenneth Gibson MSP

Friday 19 June

Dear Jenni,

Updates to the Presiding Officer's Guidance on Conduct in the Chamber and the suspension and variation of Standing Orders

Presiding Officer's Guidance on Conduct in the Chamber

I wish to draw your attention to revisions I have recently made to the 'Presiding Officer's Guidance on Conduct in the Chamber'.

The main changes are:

- Members participating in a debate must, as a minimum, be present for all opening and closing speeches and remain in the Chamber to hear at least the two speeches following their contribution.
- Members participating in a question session, either by asking one of the printed questions or by seeking a supplementary question, must be present for the whole of the question time session.
- Members wishing to ask a question on a Ministerial statement, must attend for the whole of the statement.
- If, in exceptional circumstances, a Member wishes to speak in a debate or participate in a question session but cannot attend for the whole session, they must seek advance permission from the Presiding Officers. If the Member has not received advance permission, they must make alternative arrangements, such as arranging for another Member to take their speaking slot where rules for the item of business allow for that.
- When the Chamber is sitting, Members must not cross the well of the Chamber and must avoid crossing the line of sight between the Presiding Officer and the Member who is speaking.

To maximise Members' opportunity to represent their constituents' interests and question Scottish Ministers on key issues, I have also updated the guidance to emphasise brevity: questions should normally be no more than 100 words, and answers normally no more than 150 words.

The revised guidance has been shared electronically with all Members and will be issued in hard copy in the coming weeks. It has also been published on the Parliament's website.

As you will be aware, the Standards Procedures and Public Appointments (SPPA) supports the interpretation and understanding of the Code of Conduct by producing and publishing guidance on its application. As the Presiding Officer's own Guidance

on conduct in the Chamber is referred to in the Code, I invite the SPPA Committee to consider how best to revise the Guidance on the Code of Conduct to reflect the new Guidance I have issued.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Gibson MSP

Presiding Officer

Annexe B: First option for editing the guidance on the Code

Guidance issued by the Presiding Officer on conduct

11. The Parliament's Standing Orders state that Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner and shall respect the authority of the Presiding Officer. In addition, Members shall conduct themselves in an orderly manner and, in particular, shall not conduct themselves in a way which would constitute a criminal offence or contempt of court.

12. As a central principle underpinning this revised code of conduct, the Presiding Officers expect Members to adhere to the expectations outlined above both during proceedings held in the Chamber and committees as well as in their role as an elected representative to the Scottish Parliament.

13. It is ultimately a matter for the Presiding Officer to rule on issues of Members' conduct in the chamber. However, the following has been issued previously by way of specific guidance —

Conduct in the Chamber

14. To maintain courtesy and respect, members should not behave in a way which interferes with the proper conduct of business in the Chamber. This includes—

- Attendance: Members are expected to participate in person when on the parliamentary estate, with remote participation limited to exceptional circumstances where prior consent has been granted by the Presiding Officers. Members with the intention to participate in a debate or ask a question on a Ministerial statement should be in attendance for the whole session unless prior approval has been given.
- Speaking and questions - Calling of speakers is at the discretion of the Presiding Officers and will be allocated roughly according to party balance. MSPs should phrase their contributions to address the Presiding Officer in the Chair. Questions and answers should be as concise as possible, with questions normally being more than 100 words, and answers normally no more than 150 words.
- Use of language and behaviour: Members must ensure that their choice of language in the Chamber is appropriate and meets the high standards expected of Members by the general public. Members must not use language that is insulting or discriminatory, and must avoid making allegations that another Member has deliberately lied. Members should refer to colleagues formally by name or title, such as their role in the Scottish Government, and should not use nicknames. Members must take care that private conversation or observations on debate do not disturb proceedings or make it difficult to hear whoever is speaking. It is for the Presiding Officers to make judgements on these matters and all Members must respect the decisions of the Chair.

- Interventions and Points of Order: Members may briefly interrupt another speaker only if the speaker agrees to give way. Where a Member has taken an intervention, the Presiding Officers will give the Member the intervention time back. Points of Order exist solely to raise questions about parliamentary procedure and whether rules are being followed. It is a discourtesy to other Members to use points of order to seek to continue debating points.
- Use of electronic devices - Members may use electronic devices in the Chamber for parliamentary business, including social media activity, provided they are used responsibly and in accordance with Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct for MSPs. Devices must be switched to silent mode, whilst any recording, photographing, or making calls in the Chamber is prohibited without prior permission.
- General courtesy and noise levels — Members must conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner. Please pay attention to the impact of your entry and exit from the Chamber, particularly at Decision Time and Time for Reflection, and to noise levels more generally. During debates and questions, the Presiding Officers will give a certain amount of latitude in the interests of encouraging debate and avoiding excessive formality. However, that does not mean that the Presiding Officers condone behaviour that prevents other Members or the visiting public from following a debate. Do not cross the well of the Chamber. Please do not turn you back on the Chair as this has an impact on the sightlines of the Presiding Officers.
- Use of language and behaviour — Members shall at all times ensure that their choice of language in the Chamber is appropriate and meets the high standards expected by the general public. It is for the Presiding Officers to make judgements on these matters and all Members must respect the decisions of the Chair. The Parliament’s Standing Orders provide for sanctions in relation to these matters. Members should refer to other members by their full name, refrain from the use of ‘nicknames’ and speak through the Chair, i.e. do not refer to other Members in the second person, e.g. “you”.
- Questions — when your name is selected for a question, please make every effort to submit the question to the Chamber Desk in advance of the relevant deadline. If you are unable to do so, please email the Presiding Officers and Chamber Desk providing an explanation. Please also make sure that you present yourself on time to participate fully in the questioning of Ministers. A failure to adhere to these points is not only a discourtesy to the Parliament but it also means that a fellow member may miss out on the opportunity to ask a question.
- Attendance in the Chamber — as a courtesy to your fellow members, if you wish to participate in a debate, you should attend the whole debate but, as a minimum, members should be present during the opening and closing speeches and should remain in the Chamber to hear the two speeches following their contribution. It is particularly important that closing speakers are able to reflect upon all of the contributions made during a debate.

- ~~Use of digital devices — Members may use digital devices in the Chamber for the purpose of engaging in and commenting on parliamentary business (including through social media). When doing so, Members must bear in mind their responsibility under the Code of Conduct to conduct themselves at all times with courtesy and respect. As communications through social media are not part of the parliamentary proceedings, the Presiding Officers should not be expected to rule on anything said on social media during meetings of the Parliament. Digital devices should not be used to take photographs, to record proceedings or to make telephone calls and all devices should be switched to silent mode.~~
- ~~Use of printed material — Members should not read newspapers or magazines, except where members wish to quote from articles in debate.~~

Conduct in committee meetings

15. The above guidance relating to conduct in the Chamber is applicable in formal and informal meetings of the parliamentary committees at the discretion of the convener of the committee.

Annexe C: Second option for editing the guidance on the Code

Guidance issued by the Presiding Officer on conduct

11. The Parliament's Standing Orders state that Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner and shall respect the authority of the Presiding Officer. In addition, Members shall conduct themselves in an orderly manner and, in particular, shall not conduct themselves in a way which would constitute a criminal offence or contempt of court.

12. As a central principle underpinning this revised code of conduct, the Presiding Officers expect Members to adhere to the expectations outlined above both during proceedings held in the Chamber and committees as well as in their role as an elected representative to the Scottish Parliament.

13. It is ultimately a matter for the Presiding Officer to rule on issues of Members' conduct in the chamber. ~~However, the following has been issued previously by way of specific guidance—~~The Presiding Officer has issued guidance on Conduct in the Chamber. The current guidance was published in June 2026.

Conduct in the Chamber

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- ~~• Use of language and behaviour—Members shall at all times ensure that their choice of language in the Chamber is appropriate and meets the high standards expected by the general public. It is for the Presiding Officers to make judgements on these matters and all Members must respect the decisions of the Chair. The Parliament's Standing Orders provide for sanctions in relation to these matters. Members should refer to other members by their full name, refrain from the use of 'nicknames' and speak through the Chair, i.e. do not refer to other Members in the second person, e.g. "you".~~
- ~~• Questions—when your name is selected for a question, please make every effort to submit the question to the Chamber Desk in advance of the relevant deadline. If you are unable to do so, please email the Presiding Officers and~~

~~Chamber Desk providing an explanation. Please also make sure that you present yourself on time to participate fully in the questioning of Ministers. A failure to adhere to these points is not only a discourtesy to the Parliament but it also means that a fellow member may miss out on the opportunity to ask a question.~~

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