

Parliamentary Bureau – Committee request to meet at the same time as the parliament

Introduction

1. The Parliamentary Bureau is invited to consider a request from the Public Audit Committee to meet at the same time as General Questions on Thursday 21 March 2024.

Background to Request

2. As the Parliamentary Bureau will be aware, the Public Audit Committee's programme of work is entirely dependent on the volume and nature of reports published by the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS).
3. Since Parliament resumed in January 2024, the Committee's work programme has been extremely compressed. It has considered a large number of AGS reports, including four section 22 reports relating to a concern or other matter of public interest in a public body's annual accounts as well as a further four reports and briefings published on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public bodies. The Committee has agreed to take further oral evidence on the majority of these reports, given the significance of the issues raised in them.
4. At two meetings in February, the Committee also considered its draft report in relation to its scrutiny of the joint Auditor General for Scotland and Accounts Commission report on Adult mental health, leaving little time in the Committee's work programme to schedule other items.
5. At its meeting on 21 March, the Committee will take evidence from the Scottish Government and the Water Industry Commission Scotland on the 2022/23 audit of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland. It will also take evidence from the AGS on his recent report, NHS in Scotland 2023. Both reports raise a wide range of matters that will require detailed scrutiny within a tight timetable to maintain momentum with this scrutiny.
6. It is anticipated that extending the Committee's meeting by 20 minutes on 21 March will avoid any significant disruption to the Committee's already committed future work programme up to and beyond Easter recess.
7. As the Bureau is aware, the time available on a Thursday morning often presents challenges to progressing the work programmes of committees that meet that day. For the Public Audit Committee, this is usually overcome by adhering to strict timings during the meeting. However, it would not be possible to hold both evidence sessions at the 21 March meeting without curtailing the Committee's scrutiny.

8. The clerks have explored the option to meet outwith the Committee's usual meeting slot. However, due to committee meeting clashes, this is not possible. The option to meet earlier than the Committee's usual 8.30am pre-brief start time has also been explored. However, the Committee recognises that this option is not in line with the Parliament's commitment to family-friendly working, including for witnesses, staff and the public.

Decision

9. Business Managers are therefore invited to consider the Public Audit Committee's request and to recommend to the Parliament that the Committee be given permission to meet at the same time as the Chamber during General Questions on Thursday 21 March.

Parliamentary Business Team
March 2024