

Chief Executive's Report to the SPCB February 2020

Introduction

This report looks at recent activities across the organisation throughout January and February.

Items include:

- The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee continues to develop its thinking on a parliament-wide approach to climate change. The Committee plans to hold an informal meeting with SPCB members to discuss this further. Arrangements for this session will be made in due course.
- The legislative programme continues to be busy with a significant number of bills in the Parliamentary process. This includes Government, Member, and committee bills as well as one Private Bill.
- The Government introduced the Budget Bill for financial year 2020-21 on 6 February. The Government proposes that the Bill should be passed by 5 March. Achieving Royal Assent before the start of the financial year will therefore depend on the Government securing agreement from the UK and Scottish Government law officers, and the Secretary of State, to waive part of the 4-week period they have to consider the Bill before it is sent for Royal Assent.
- Committees continue to test new online engagement tools to reach a more diverse audience during calls for views. The Health and Sport, Education and Skills, Local Government and Communities, and Equalities and Human Rights committees have all given positive feedback on the various tools used as part of their recent engagement activities.
- Tracey White, Group Head of Chamber, Reporting and Broadcasting was recently recognised as Stonewall's Senior Champion of the Year at the 2020 Stonewall Awards for her work as "Leadership Champion" of SPOut, the Parliament's LGBT+ network.

David McGill

Clerk/Chief Executive

Overview of parliamentary activities

Parliamentary Business

Climate change and the Scottish Parliament

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee continues to develop its thinking on a Parliament-wide approach to climate change. The Convener recently met with the Presiding Officer and Chief Executive to discuss the ambition of the Parliament in terms of how a net zero Parliament might be achieved, Parliament's role in leading action on climate change, and how climate change and sustainable development should and could be part of the Parliament's Strategic Plan. The Committee plans to hold an informal meeting with the Chief Executive and SPCB members to discuss this further and has also written to the Conveners Group seeking a discussion on how to embed climate change in parliamentary scrutiny.

Lobbying Register

The Lobbying Registrar and Assistant Lobbying Registrar appeared before the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to discuss their first annual report. The Lobbying (Scotland) Act puts an obligation on the Parliament to make arrangements for one of its committees to review the operation of the Act after two years. That anniversary falls in March and the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee will undertake the review. It has plans to agree its approach shortly.

The Lobbying Register Team continued its programme of outreach activities with a compliance workshop in Aberdeen on 11 February and will attend at The Gathering in Glasgow the following week. The Gathering is the largest annual event for third sector organisations in Scotland.

Parliamentary business/legislative workload

The Government introduced the Budget Bill for financial year 2020-21 on 6 February, in advance of the UK budget expected on 11 March. Various teams in the parliamentary service have been involved, in conjunction with Scottish Government colleagues, in considering the options for scrutiny of the Bill within the limited time available if the Bill is to be passed in time to receive Royal Assent before the start of the financial year. The Finance and Constitution Committee and the Bureau have considered the options for scrutiny. The Government proposes that the Bill should be passed by 5 March. Achieving Royal Assent before the start of the financial year will depend on the Government securing agreement from the UK and Scottish Government law officers, and the Secretary of State, to waive part of the 4-week period they have to consider the Bill before it is sent for Royal Assent.

In the period December-February there has been a significant amount of work by committees on Bills at Stage 1, with 13 Bills at Stage 1 during that period. The period February-June is expected to see a continuing significant volume of legislative activity for the Parliament. Amending Stages for many of those 13 Bills will fall during this period, along with the expected introduction of around 15 new Bills (including non-Government Bills). Legislation will comprise a substantial proportion of Chamber and committee time in this period.

Three NGBU-drafted Members' Bills are currently in progress, the most recently-introduced being the Tied Pubs Bill on 3 February. NGBU's primary focus is on finalising for introduction six other Members' Bills ahead of the sessional cut off (as outlined to the SPCB in November 2019). All are making good progress. NGBU is also assisting in the preparation of three Committee Bills and providing clerking support to a Private Bill Committee, which published a Preliminary Stage Report in January; Consideration Stage is expected to take place in February.

The first phase of the Parliament's scrutiny of secondary legislation related to the UK leaving the EU is largely complete. This is the scrutiny of the secondary legislation made under the EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018 by the Scottish Ministers to address 'deficiencies' that were considered urgent to resolve to ensure a functioning statute book after exit day. This phase has also involved scrutiny of the Scottish Ministers' proposal to consent to the UK Government making UK secondary legislation on devolved matters under that 2018 Act. This involved the design and agreement of new processes to secure the ability of the Parliament to have effective and proportionate oversight of a large volume of legislation relating to its responsibilities, but over which it had no direct procedural control. This has been a significant piece of work for subject committees, supported by analysis from OSSP and SPICe. Attention in the coming months is expected to focus on ensuring effective parliamentary scrutiny of legislation and inter-governmental arrangements required to implement 'common frameworks'. These are arrangements in devolved areas that were previously within the competence of the EU and on which an UK-wide approach is now being negotiated between the UK Government and devolved administrations. Various departments, including Chamber and Committee Offices, SPICe and OSSP are co-operating in this work.

Following the Queen's Speech at the start of the current session of the UK Parliament in December, a number of UK Bills are expected to require legislative consent. These include legislation arising from the UK leaving the EU, and legislation on a range of other matters.

SPPA committee

Revisions to the Code of Conduct for MSPs have now been made to implement the recommendations on the Joint Working Group on Sexual Harassment. As well as its work on the two elections bills making their way through the system, the SPPA Committee has now published a report on a proposal to introduce a Bill on Financial Assistance to Non-Government Political Parties (Short Money).

Broadcasting

The broadcasting team worked with others to provide a makeshift broadcast compound for broadcast vehicles in the Landscaped Gardens during Brexit protests outside the Parliament on 31 January. This helped ensure the safety of the public and media partners. Five domestic and 12 international broadcasters took live footage of the protests.

The team is working with visitor services to commission a hearing audit, that will assess how effective the building systems are in providing access to visitors and staff who have hearing difficulties. The Main Hall, Chamber and Committee Rooms will be the first focus of testing.

Parliamentary Engagement

The Digital Engagement Tools Team, a cross cutting team representing several offices, continues to trial various online public engagement platforms. One tool, “Citizen Space”, is now being tested by the Health and Sport Committee during calls for views. Early indications show that the use of the platform has increased the number of individuals who submit written evidence and supports the streamlining of many administrative processes. Initial participant feedback is positive, with 81% of users finding the platform easy to use, and only 4% reporting difficulties. Discussions are underway with relevant offices to explore further testing of the platform to improve and support the calls for views process.

Citizen Space is also being used by the Education and Skills Committee as part of its inquiry into the effectiveness of teacher training. Following a targeted push on Facebook the platform has enabled over 650 teachers and trainee teachers to engage with the Committee.

Another of the tools being trialled, “Your Priorities”, has been used to gather views for the Local Government and Communities Committee’s work on community wellbeing. There has been significant interest in this piece of work with 643 participants using the platform, producing over 200 ideas and over 400 comments. This tool is also being used by the Equalities & Human Rights Committee for engagement around the Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill with over 50 individuals and organisations using it to share their views on how the Bill will affect their lives.

The Health and Sport Committee has used a third online engagement tool called “Dialogue” as part of its scrutiny of NHS Grampian. As a result of using this tool the Committee received 35 ideas and 49 comments from the public. Members found it useful to hear real-life examples and were able to refer to these when taking evidence from NHS Grampian.

International Relations

January was another busy month for the International Relations Office with several inward visits supported.

On 14 January the Secretary Generals of the Finnish Parliament and Legislative Director and Special Adviser at the Prime Minister's Office met with Scottish Parliament officials to discuss Scotland's Futures Forum and the current political climate.

On 16 January Interns from the Canadian Federal Parliament met with MSPs and Scottish Parliament officials to discuss the work and procedures of the Scottish Parliament and current political issues in Scotland.

From 22 to 24 of January the President of the National Assembly of Quebec, François Paradis MNA met with the Presiding Officer, MSPs and Scottish Parliament officials for discussions on public engagement, parliamentary reform, parliamentary business procedure and the current political and constitutional landscape in Scotland.

On 29 January the German-British Parliamentary Group of the State Parliament North Rhine-Westphalia met with members of the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee; the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee; the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee; and the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee to discuss current political issues in Scotland and North Rhine-Westphalia.

The President, Vice President and Secretary General of the Nordic Council met with the Presiding Officer, MSPs and Scottish Parliament officials on 30 January to discuss Scotland's connection to the Nordic region, safeguarding biodiversity and shared policy priorities.

Quebec Agent General, Pierre Gabriel Côté met with the Presiding Officer on his first official visit to the Scottish Parliament on 30 January.

Events and Exhibitions

On Wednesday 18 December the Presiding Officer hosted the annual Carol Service in the Garden Lobby and the Main Hall. Members, their staff and Scottish Parliament staff were joined by residents and businesses from the Holyrood community. Performers at the event included the Royal Mile Primary School, Newtongrange Silver Band, the Edinburgh Signing Choir and Coroedina.

The annual Consular Corps' Burns Supper, hosted by the Presiding Officer, took place on Wednesday 22 January with musical contributions from a harp and fiddle duo from The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and singer Abby Wilson, a student at Port Glasgow High School. The address to the haggis was given by Young Burnsonian Liam Kearney.

Visitor Services

The start of the year is traditionally one of the quietest periods for visitors to the building. In January, 900 people joined the regular public tours and a further 456 people attended our Ten-Minute Talks in the Main Hall.

Forward Look

The annual International Women's Day 2020 event hosted by Deputy Presiding Officer Linda Fabiani MSP will take place on Saturday 7 March.

The Scottish Youth Parliament Spring Sitting will take place at the Scottish Parliament on Friday 20 and Saturday 21 March chaired by the Presiding Officers.

The Parliament Shop will again mark LGBT History Month throughout February with a display of books and related merchandise.

Diversity and Inclusion

A lot has been achieved since the Parliament launched its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in 2017 (for example, establishing diversity networks, markedly reducing the gender pay gap and increasing the number of staff from black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds). To build on this, the latest delivery plan is being rolled out in February and will focus on the contribution that all offices can make to deliver the Parliament's objectives. By using tools such as Equality Impact Assessments, offices will be asked to look at the impact of their policies and services on different groups and whether they will help the Parliament reach its goal of becoming more diverse.

The Parliament's work on Diversity and Inclusion continues to be recognised by others. Tracey White, Head of Chamber, Reporting and Broadcasting has been awarded the Stonewall UK Senior Champion of the Year for her work with the Parliament's SPOut Network recognising Tracey's commitment and leadership.

Our diversity networks continue to encourage discussion on issues through various events and initiatives. For example, the Mental Health Network held a 'Time to Talk' day on Thursday 6 February to encourage everyone to talk about mental health issues and SPOut are hosting a series of events throughout February to mark LGBT history month.