

Parliamentary Bureau – Request to Appoint Adviser

Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee:

Background

1. The Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee agreed at its meeting on 13 June 2024 the remit of its inquiry on Committee Effectiveness. The inquiry will seek to answer the question:

“Are there changes to the Parliament’s procedures and practices which would help committees to work more effectively?”

2. The inquiry will consider three main themes:
 - a. Structure: The current structure of committees, the best size of membership and the number of committees. The remit of committees, including whether they should mirror the Scottish Government Ministerial portfolios or whether a different approach could be taken.
 - b. Elected Conveners: Whether elected conveners would bring cultural changes to the operation of committees.
 - c. Evaluation: How committees currently evaluate their work and whether there are changes or improvements which could be made. This may include approaches to pre and post legislative scrutiny and considerations of how work is planned to build in evaluation and reflection.
3. The Committee will seek to engage a substantive number and cross section of current Members of the Parliament in the inquiry. The Committee will also seek the views and experiences of those outwith the Parliament.

Appointment of Adviser

4. At its meeting on 27 June 2024, the Committee agreed that it wished to appoint a committee adviser on a short-term contract to assist in shaping the inquiry, providing background information of relevance and assisting the analysis and scrutiny of the evidence received during the course of the inquiry. The Committee agreed that given the primarily internal focus for the inquiry, it may also be helpful to have an external perspective and an adviser would be able to provide a ‘critical friend’/challenge function to the Committee’s work. The Committee agreed the specification set out below.
5. It is proposed that the adviser be appointed at a standard day rate, for up to 10 days, during the period from October 2024 to April 2025.

Adviser Specification

Adviser duties

6. The role of the adviser will be to provide advice and assistance to the Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee during its consideration of its Committee Effectiveness Inquiry.
7. Specifically, the adviser will provide background information of relevance and assist in the analysis and scrutiny of the evidence received during the course of the inquiry.
8. The adviser will also provide impartial evidence-based specialist knowledge on parliamentary committees and offer an external perspective to what is primarily an internal focus for the inquiry. They will also be able to provide a 'critical friend'/challenge function to the Committee's work.
9. On occasion, the adviser may also be asked to assist the clerking team and the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) in (a) proposing witnesses for the inquiry for the Committee to consider (b) providing briefing materials to inform oral evidence sessions (c) peer review and support with drafting sections of the report to the Parliament on the Inquiry.

Person Specification

Skills/Abilities

10. The adviser will have proven analytical skills. Excellent communication skills, both oral and written. Specifically they will be able to communicate complex concepts in a clear and succinct manner. The adviser will also have the ability to work to tight deadlines.

Experience

11. The adviser will have experience of matters relating to Parliamentary committees. Experience of working with politicians and committees would be an advantage.

Knowledge

12. As well as knowledge of the structure, procedure and work of the Scottish Parliament, the adviser will be able to demonstrate a knowledge of how this compares and contrasts with how other parliament's committees are structured and operate.

Time Commitment

13. It is estimated that up to 10 days work will be required during the period from approximately Oct 2024 to April 2025. This is the maximum time commitment. It is expected that the peak of the work will be Dec 2024- Feb 2025 to support the lead up to and oral evidence sessions on the inquiry.

14. The Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee normally meet on Thursday mornings, apart from during parliamentary recesses (which mirror closely Scottish school holidays). Arrangements can be made for attendance at meetings to be done remotely, with no requirement to attend the Parliament in person.

Communications and Conflicts of interest

15. Ongoing communications will be with the Clerk to the Committee, but there will also be written and oral communication between the adviser and the Committee.
16. All advice and work undertaken as an adviser is confidential unless otherwise authorised by the Committee as is the content of discussions with Members or Parliament officials and any documentation associated with the role.
17. As part of applying for a post, candidates must indicate if they are aware of any areas where there could be a conflict of interest between accepting the position of adviser and any other activity they may be undertaking. Such activity could involve either paid or unpaid work or could involve political activity.

Decision

18. The Bureau is invited to approve the appointment of an adviser to assist the Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in its scrutiny of its inquiry on Committee Effectiveness.

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee
August 2024