

Correspondence from the Finance and Public Administration Committee

Introduction

1. The Finance and Public Administration Committee has written to the Bureau drawing attention to the report arising from its inquiry “Scotland’s Commissioner Landscape: A Strategic Approach in December 2023”. The letter is in the Annexe below.
2. The Committee will hold a debate on its report following October recess.
3. The Bureau is invited to note the correspondence at this stage and consider its recommendations – particularly relating to the establishment of a new, dedicated Parliamentary Committee - at a future meeting, following the Committee debate.

Parliamentary Business Team
September 2024

Annexe

Letter To: Parliamentary Bureau

From: Finance and Public Administration Committee

16 September 2024

Dear Alison

Scotland's Commissioner Landscape: A Strategic Approach

As you are aware, the Finance and Public Administration Committee launched an inquiry into Scotland's Commissioner Landscape: A Strategic Approach in December 2023. During the period January to June 2024, the Committee gathered extensive evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals through written submissions, as well as seven oral evidence sessions, and two informal discussions.

The Committee is now pleased to share with the Parliamentary Bureau a copy of our inquiry report, which is being published today.

As you will see from the report, the Committee heard compelling evidence that the current model is no longer fit-for-purpose. In the absence of a clear and coherent framework underpinning how the overall landscape should operate, it has evolved in an 'ad hoc' way with individual proposals being agreed to on a case-by-case basis. The result is a disjointed landscape, comprised of a collection of individual bodies, with varying functions and powers. It is our firm view that now is the time to pause and take stock before further complexity is added to the landscape.

The Committee is therefore calling for a moratorium on creating new SPCB supported bodies, or expanding the remits of existing bodies, while a 'root and branch' review is carried out. The purpose of the review is to design a clear strategic framework to underpin and provide more coherence and structure to the landscape. It would also ensure more effective accountability and scrutiny mechanisms, improved delivery of outcomes and value for money. The criteria for creating new supported bodies would also be strengthened and formalised to ensure that proposals are only brought forward when a clear need has been demonstrated.

The Committee recommends that this review is carried out by a dedicated Parliamentary committee, set up in the model of the Session 3 SPCB Supported Bodies Committee, drawing on the support of all political parties and with meaningful engagement from the Scottish Government. Should the Parliament agree to our recommendations when it debates the report in early course, we ask that this work begins as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, we have made a series of recommendations that can be put in place now which will enhance the transparency, accountability, and scrutiny of existing arrangements.

As you will recognise, designing and delivering an SPCB supported body landscape that is fit for the future is a collective endeavour with the SPCB, Scottish Government, Parliamentary Bureau, Committees, MSPs, and Conveners Group, each having a role to play in ensuring that the new structure delivers the best outcomes and value for money for the people of Scotland.

The Committee would therefore welcome the Parliamentary Bureau's support as we begin this journey towards a more coherent landscape.

In the meantime, we would be happy to discuss the report findings and possible next steps should this be helpful.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener