



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Shona Robison MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance
and Local Government
Scottish Government

By email

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Dear Shona

Thank you for your letter of today's date in which you propose that the Scottish Government's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and related documents are published on Thursday 20 June 2024, rather than on 30 May as originally planned. The Committee considered your letter at our meeting today.

The Committee is deeply disappointed at the significant delay in publishing the MTFS. While we understand that a short delay might be required to allow "the incoming First Minister to take a view on critical policy issues and align the fiscal strategy with the Government's wider approach", we do not accept that a three-week delay is justified. As you note in your letter, this timeframe does not meet the expectation set out in the Written Agreement between the Committee and the Scottish Government that the MTFS be published at least four weeks prior to summer recess.

Your letter states that you have sought to strike a balance between ensuring that the MTFS can inform Parliamentary Committee scrutiny with the time needed for Scottish Ministers to take relevant policy decisions and for the SFC to achieve its forecast publication timetable. The Committee does not however consider that the date of 20 June strikes the right balance, given that this would provide limited time for analysis and consideration prior the Committee hearing from you and the SFC on

your preferred date of 25 June. Indeed, it would be challenging to turn around the necessary papers to support Committee Members' scrutiny, prior to evidence taking on 25 June.

It would also detrimentally impact on Subject Committees' ability to use the MTFS and SFC Forecasts to inform decisions on their respective approaches to Pre-Budget 2025-26 Scrutiny, as intended by the Budget Process Review Group in its 2017 Report. The Committee considers that the timeframe proposed is therefore unacceptable and would significantly undermine the ability of the Scottish Parliament's committees to effectively perform our scrutiny role of Scotland's public finances.

The Committee is unanimous in suggesting that a more appropriate balance would be reached if the MTFS and SFC Forecasts were instead published by noon on Wednesday 12 June. This would enable the FPA Committee to take evidence from you, as planned, on 18 June, and subject committees to fully reflect the documents in their Pre-Budget scrutiny approaches, prior to summer recess.

On other matters, I am grateful to you for agreeing to meet with me before summer recess to discuss issues such as the timetable for publication and scrutiny of the Scottish Budget and other relevant Scottish Government publications. The Committee's Clerks will be in touch with your officials to find a suitable date.

The Committee also notes your continued support for a parliamentary debate on longer term fiscal sustainability. Given the time that has elapsed since publication of the SFC's Fiscal Sustainability Report in March 2023, and your commitment from October 2023 to hold such a debate, our strong preference is for this debate to be held before summer recess.

I look forward to our continued engagement on these matters.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener
Finance and Public Administration Committee