

# Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

## 7th Meeting 2022 (Session 6), Thursday 3 March 2022

### Citizens' Assembly of Scotland

#### Background

1. The Citizens' Assembly was established in 2019 by the Scottish Government and was composed of 100 citizens from across Scotland who were broadly representative of the country. The Assembly members considered three key questions:

- What kind of country are we seeking to build?
- How best can we overcome the challenges Scotland and the world face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century including those arising from Brexit?
- What further work should be carried out to give us the information we need to make informed choices about the future of the country?

2. The Citizens' Assembly met four times in person and four times online to deliberate on these questions and make recommendations. Their [vision and recommendations](#) and their [full report](#) are available on their [website](#).

3. The Minister for Parliamentary Business wrote to the Presiding Officer in December 2021 highlighting some of the recommendations made under the theme of *How decisions are taken* and indicated that he looked forward to building on discussions as to how to “achieve the greater involvement, transparency and trust the Assembly has called for.” The Minister’s letter and the recommendations for the Scottish Parliament are set out at Annexe A,

4. In February, the Presiding Officer wrote to the Convener to forward the Minister’s letter and to invite the Committee to indicate that it would be for the Committee to decide if it wished to engage with the Citizens’ assembly (Annexe B).

#### Committee consideration

5. The Committee is invited to consider the recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly and any work it would like to undertake in relation to these recommendations.

SPPA Committee clerks  
February 2022

**Annexe A – Letter from the Minister for Parliamentary Business**

Minister for Parliamentary Business  
George Adam MSP

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Rt. Hon Alison Johnstone MSP  
Presiding Officer  
Scottish Parliament  
EDINBURGH  
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02 December 2021

Dear Alison,

**Citizens' Assembly of Scotland**

My Parliamentary statement on 23 November marked the publication of the government's response to the report of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland, Doing Politics Differently.

I referred in particular to the Assembly's recommendations under their first theme, How decisions are taken. These include proposals for a greater use of the citizens' assembly approach, and the establishment of new mechanisms for direct participation in the democratic process such as a 'house of citizens' and 'citizens' committee'. They also make several recommendations on measures to ensure the integrity, and improve the democratic accountability, of government, the Parliament and individual MSPs. The relevant recommendations are set out in the annex to this letter.

These recommendations go to the heart of how parliamentary democracy in Scotland operates, and engage the interests of all political parties, civic Scotland and the Scottish Parliament as an institution. These issues are therefore ones which the government will be looking to work with the Parliament to take forward.

I understand that officials from the government and Parliament have already had some initial discussions on these matters. I look forward to us building on these, with other Parliamentary colleagues, to examine how best to achieve the greater involvement, transparency and trust the Assembly has called for.

I am copying this letter to the other members of the Parliamentary Bureau.

**George Adam MSP**  
**Minister for Parliamentary Business**

## ANNEX

**CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY OF SCOTLAND  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT**

3. The Citizens' Assembly recommends that in order to overcome the challenges in relation to citizens' engagement in decision-making the Scottish Government and Parliament should:

- set up a 'house of citizens' to scrutinise government proposals and give assent to parliamentary bills. Membership should be time-limited and representative of the population of Scotland, similar to the way this CA was selected. There should be an oversight body to ensure this.

[ Voting results: Strongly Disagree 5.83%; Disagree 10.68%; Agree 41.75%; Strongly agree 41.75%; Total votes 103.]

4. The Citizens' Assembly recommends that in order to overcome the challenges in relation to citizens' engagement in decision-making the Scottish Government and Parliament should:

- set up a citizens' committee in Scottish Parliament. This would be a randomly selected body, with members being encouraged and supported to take part. It would offer advice and opinions on government proposals, review the work of parliament and hold the government to account. It would be for a fixed term with members receiving a gift of thanks.

[Voting results: Strongly Disagree 4.85%; Disagree 9.71%; Agree 38.83%; Strongly agree 46.60%; Total votes 103.]

7. The Citizens' Assembly recommends that in order to allow citizens to make informed decisions in relation to Scotland leading with integrity, honesty, humility and transparency in a self-sufficient and innovative way the Scottish Government and Parliament should:

- ensure the honesty, transparency and integrity of politicians, the existing standards of behaviour should be promoted and strengthened if required, to increase accountability of those elected for their actions within government.

[Voting results: Strongly Disagree 0.97% Disagree 2.91%; Agree 32.04%; Strongly agree 64.08%; Total votes 103 ].

8. The Citizens' Assembly recommends that in order to overcome the challenges in relation to citizens' engagement in decision-making the Scottish Government and Parliament should:

- encourage MSPs to act on the views of their constituents, rather than sticking with party lines. They should actively consult with constituents on matters which may have an impact on their community and on matters about which a significant number of constituents have shown concern.

[Voting results: Strongly Disagree 0.97%; Disagree 7.77%; Agree 43.69%; Strongly agree 47.57%; Total votes 103].

9. The Citizens' Assembly recommends that in order to overcome the challenges in relation to the lack of public trust in politicians the Scottish Government and Parliament should:

- appoint a non-political independent review body to do a forensic investigation to deliver:
  - a more accountable parliament with acceptable standards of behaviour
  - responsibility for delivery on commitments
  - faster public access to information on what is happening
  - acknowledgement of all those who supported society during Covid-19

[Voting results: Strongly Disagree 2.91%; Disagree 12.62%; Agree 39.81%; Strongly agree 44.66%; Total votes 103 ].

10. The Citizens' Assembly recommends that in order to overcome the challenges of/failure to deliver on policy the Scottish Government and Parliament should:

- be held accountable and consequences in place when goals are not met.

[Voting results: Strongly Disagree 0.97%; Disagree 9.71%; Agree 31.07%; Strongly agree 58.25%; Total votes 103].

**Annexe B – Letter from the Presiding Officer**

Martin Whitfield MSP  
Convener  
Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee  
By email

9 February 2022

Dear Martin

I attach, for the interest of your Committee, a letter from the Minister for Parliamentary Business concerning the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland.

I believe that the letter, and the recommendations for the Scottish Parliament contained in the annex, will be of interest to your committee given its role in relation to the practices and procedures of the Parliament and parliamentary standards.

In replying to the Minister, I have asked that his officials engage with the clerks to your Committee in relation to this work. Of course, it is for your Committee to decide how it wishes to engage with the recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly and the timescales for any work that it might wish to take forward.

I have written in similar terms to the Convener of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, given the elements of its remit relating to deliberative democracy, Citizens' Assemblies or other forms of participative engagement.

With best wishes

**Alison Johnstone MSP**  
Presiding Office