

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

12th Meeting 2023 (Session 6), Thursday 15 June 2023

Correspondence from Graeme Dey MSP on parliamentary motions

Purpose of the paper

1. At its meeting on [19 January 2023](#) the Committee considered a letter from Graeme Dey MSP (Annexe) which raised concerns about the type and number of parliamentary motions lodged to congratulate individuals or organisations and whether procedural changes were required. The Committee asked for further information to inform its view.
2. This paper, along with the SPICe Analysis, provides information on the key trends in congratulatory motions over the parliamentary sessions and the rules and guidance for lodging motions.

Volume of congratulatory motions

3. Graeme Dey MSP suggested in his letter that he considered there to be a growing number of parliamentary motions lodged to congratulate individuals or organisations which did not mark significant achievements and questioned whether this was having an impact on the time taken to process them by the Chamber Desk.
4. The SPICe analysis provides information on trends in usage of motions that begin with or include the term “That the parliament congratulates”.
5. The analysis does not seek to distinguish between different types of congratulatory motions. Members may wish to note that the analysis is therefore likely to have captured different kinds of congratulatory motions not just those that Graeme Dey MSP has expressed concern about. The analysis may have captured motions ranging from those congratulating small monetary awards from the Big Lottery Fund to congratulating an organisation on providing mental health care to thousands of people over a 25-year period. There may also be motions that congratulate someone for achieving something of national significance or that offer congratulations but where the substance of the motions is political.
6. The Analysis does suggest that the percentage of motions lodged which are congratulatory has increased each Session from Session 1 to Session 5. The analysis

also suggests that Session 5 marked a peak in the percentage of congratulatory motions lodged with a slightly smaller percentage being lodged in the current session.

7. There may be a range of factors which have contributed to the change in usage of congratulatory motions over the parliamentary sessions. These could include the increased automation of the process for lodging motions and the growth of social media making it both easier to lodge and publicise motions. COVID-19 restrictions in Session 5 and beginning of Session 6, may also have influenced the number of congratulatory motions.

Current rules and guidance

8. In his letter Graeme Dey MSP asked the Committee whether there is any current guidance regarding what should be lodged as a motion and whether any changes should be considered.

9. In accordance with Rule 8.2.2, for a motion to be admissible it must:

- be in English;
- not contain offensive language;
- not breach any enactment or rule of law or be contrary to the public interest;
- not contravene Standing Orders Rule 7.5.1 (relating to sub judice)

10. Motions are acceptable for lodging if they do not breach standing orders or guidance on motions. Under the present system and these overall rules, it is a matter of judgement for individual members as to whether an issue deserves to be mentioned in a Parliamentary motion. It is also up to members to decide which motions they wish to support.

Previous SPPA Committee consideration

11. Members may also wish to note that Christine Grahame MSP raised a similar issue in 2013 with the then SPPA Committee regarding whether what was deemed 'local motions' should be considered part of the formal motions process. The Committee took the view that no changes were required to the procedure of these types of motions. They were viewed as a valuable way of highlighting local issues and offering a way of acknowledging constituent endeavours.

Decision

12. The Committee is invited to consider whether it requires any further information before deciding how to respond to the concerns raised by Graeme Dey.

Annexe – Letter from Graeme Dey MSP

Martin Whitfield MSP Convenor
Standards, Procedures & Public Appointments Committee The Scottish Parliament
9th November 2022

Dear Martin,

Recognising your committee's workload, I have thought long and hard before writing to you. However, the issue I wish to raise has been troubling me for some time, and that concern continues to grow.

In essence, what I am seeking is an understanding of any current guidance (if such exists) covering members' lodging of Parliamentary Motions congratulating organisations or individuals - and whether the Committee might consider this a matter worthy of its consideration. To explain, I am greatly concerned by the changing nature of Parliamentary Motions lodged by members across the Parliament and what, in my view, is the resultant devaluing of this means of marking very significant achievements.

When I first entered Parliament in 2011, such motions in practice were only lodged to celebrate genuinely notable matters - achievements of national or international stature, major anniversaries or standout contributions to constituency or Scottish life. Upon returning to the backbenches earlier this year, I was surprised to see how Motions had "evolved".

That evolution has continued over recent weeks to the point where Parliamentary Motions are now being lodged to mark not only the winning of local competitions but even being shortlisted for these. We are seeing birthdays noted, as well as retirements and fundraising which, though worthy, has generated relatively small sums. I am not sure that is entirely in keeping with the original intent or spirit of this mechanism.

The volumes - in part due to some members marking the outcome of competitions by raising a motion congratulating the winner of each individual category - are also contributing, I suspect, to a slow turnaround time from the Chamber Desk. In summary, I am wondering:

1. Is there guidance around what should be lodged as a Motion?
2. If there is, does it perhaps, in the view of your committee, require updating?
3. If there is not, then is this something the Parliament/Committee might wish to address?

I very much appreciate your consideration of my letter.

Kind regards,
Graeme Dey MSP