

## Correspondence from the Public Audit Committee

### Introduction

1. The Public Audit Committee has written to the Bureau raising concerns about the constraints placed on its time due to the requirement to conclude by 11:40am when it meets on Thursday mornings. Under Rule 12.3.3B a meeting of a committee may be held when a meeting of the Parliament is in progress only if the Parliament so decides on a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau. The letter is in the attached Annexe.
2. Under Standing Orders, the Bureau is responsible for proposing the establishment, remit, membership and duration of any committee or sub-committee. The letter informs the Bureau of the Committee's preference to meet on an alternative sitting day in the context of this role and the possible impact on Committee membership.
3. The Bureau is invited to note the correspondence and agree whether it wishes to respond on any of the matters it raises.

Parliamentary Business Team  
October 2024

## Annexe

Alison Johnstone MSP  
Presiding Officer  
Scottish Parliament

25 October 2024

Dear Presiding Officer

### Committee meeting timetabling

At its Business Planning Day on 29 August 2024, the Public Audit Committee (PAC) reflected on our working practices, and in particular, the time available on a Thursday morning to progress its work programme.

Given the Standing Order rule that committee meetings must conclude before chamber business commences, the PAC is required to conclude its business before General Questions begins at 11.40am. This often places significant time constraints on the Committee's ability to undertake in-depth and high-quality scrutiny.

The Committee's workload has increased in the last couple of years with the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) now publishing and referring briefings and blogs for consideration, in addition to formal section 22 and section 23 reports. As well as the volume of AGS outputs increasing, many of these raise significant issues requiring detailed scrutiny over a series of meetings. For example, the Committee is currently scrutinising a wide range of detailed and high-profile reports published by the AGS including the 2022/23 audit of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland, Tackling digital exclusion and Scotland's colleges 2024.

Reports to be published by the AGS during the rest of 2024 and into 2025 will also merit in-depth scrutiny by the Committee, including the 2023/24 audit of the Scottish Government Consolidated Accounts, Alcohol and drug services, and Public service reform and fiscal sustainability. It is also likely that section 22 reports on specific public bodies where significant issues have been identified will be published during this period, each requiring effective scrutiny.

The Committee routinely adheres to strict timings for each item on its agenda to ensure each can be considered within the time constraints it faces by meeting on a Thursday morning. Where it has been considered necessary, workarounds have been put in place. For example, limiting the number of items on the Committee's agenda, and in exceptional circumstances, making a request to the Bureau to meet at the same time as chamber proceedings. However, the Committee does not consider that these ad-hoc workarounds represent a satisfactory approach to the scheduling of Committee business.

In light of the current volume of work that the Committee is undertaking, coupled by a number of forthcoming reports that will be published by the AGS on significant and in some cases, high-profile issues, the Committee is concerned that continuing to meet

on a Thursday morning will limit its ability to undertake effective scrutiny in a responsive and timeous manner.

As a courtesy, the Committee wanted to make the Bureau aware of our preference to meet on an alternative sitting day. We are acutely aware of the Bureau's central role in relation to committee establishment, remit and duration, and recognise that business managers may have concerns regarding the possible impact on Committee membership.

The Committee recognises that other Parliamentary committees often face similar time constraints by meeting on a Thursday morning. We therefore appreciate that there may be a wider question for the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee around the scheduling of Parliamentary business.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this matter further if that would be helpful.

The Committee would be grateful for an early response.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Leonard MSP  
Convener