



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Finance and Public Administration Committee

John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet
Secretary for COVID Recovery

By email

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Dear Deputy First Minister

The Finance and Public Administration Committee considered our future work programme at our meeting on 21 February 2023 and agreed to write to you seeking further information on a number of issues. These requests are set out below.

Public service reform

You will be aware of the Committee's interest in the Scottish Government's programme for public service reform which, as noted in the Resource Spending Review (RSR) published in May 2022, is intended to take place over the lifetime of this Parliament. The Committee recently agreed to undertake an inquiry which aims to promote greater understanding of, and transparency around, the Scottish Government's aims for this reform programme, including the measures it is putting in place to support public bodies to achieve these aims. We are keen as part of this inquiry to be able to track the progress made by the Scottish Government and public bodies towards meeting these aims for reform over the next few years, and to scrutinise the outcomes of this work towards the end of the session.

The first part of this inquiry aimed to seek, through the Committee's Budget Report 2023-24, clear and detailed data on how the Scottish Government plans to achieve each of the five priorities for reform set out in the RSR, of: (1) digitalisation, (2) maximising revenue through public sector innovation, (3) reform of the public sector

estate, (4) reform of the public body landscape, and (5) improving public procurement. The Committee noted that, while the Scottish Government's response to our Budget Report 2023-24 provides some further details on its plans, there is little evidence of there being an overarching framework in place as a structure to support reform.

To support our inquiry work, we therefore seek exact details of the Scottish Government's aims and end objectives for its public service reform programme for the remainder of this parliamentary session. We would also thereafter ask that you provide six monthly updates setting out the progress made against these aims and objectives.

The next phase of our inquiry is to gather evidence directly from public bodies through a call for views to be issued by the end of February 2023.

Scottish Government's response to three Session 5 harassment reviews

The Committee has considered your latest quarterly update of 14 February 2023 setting out progress against the actions in the Scottish Government's Continuous Improvement Programme (CIP) and updated complaints process arising from its response to the three harassment reviews that took place in Session 5. The Committee notes that "the CIP has now completed its activities" and that the Scottish Government therefore intends to "absorb the activities the programme commenced into ongoing work throughout the organisation rather than through the creation of another iteration of the programme". The Committee agreed to seek an annual, rather than quarterly, update from you on how the complaints process and new measures for information management, record-keeping and cultural change are bedding in. The Committee will then pursue any issues arising from these updates with the Permanent Secretary, as appropriate, as part of his annual evidence session with the Committee around May each year.

The Committee will also continue to explore issues relating to the culture of the Scottish Government as part of our wider work on public administration, such as through our inquiry into effective decision-making.

Fiscal transparency

You will be aware of the Committee's ongoing interest in enhancing fiscal transparency, from issues we have raised as part of our previous pre-budget and budget scrutiny. As part of this work, the Committee has previously noted the aims of the Scottish Exchequer Fiscal Transparency Discovery Report to "make the existing large amount of fiscal information more accessible, understandable, linked and open". We have also welcomed the additional information provided by the Scottish Government in its supporting documents to in-year budget revisions, along with the recent publication of budget information by Classification of Functions of Government (COFOG) with the aim of allowing spending to be more easily tracked over time.

The Committee now seeks an update setting out the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to achieve the aims of the Discovery Report on making fiscal information “more accessible, linked and open”.

The Committee would welcome a response to the above issues by 23 March 2023.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener
Finance and Public Administration Committee