



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 15 June 2023

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Thursday 15 June 2023

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
CORRESPONDENCE (GRAEME DEY MSP)	2

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
12th Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con) (Committee Substitute)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)

Scottish Parliament
Standards, Procedures and
Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 15 June 2023

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Decision on Taking Business in
Private

The Convener (Martin Whitfield): Good morning, and welcome to the 12th meeting in 2023 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. Edward Mountain has given his apologies, so I welcome Stephen Kerr as a substitute member. Good morning, Stephen.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con) (Committee Substitute): Good morning.

The Convener: Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take business in private. Do members agree to take in private item 3, as well as future consideration of correspondence from the Parliamentary Bureau, changes to the standing orders and changes to the code of conduct and to its guidance?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Correspondence
(Graeme Dey MSP)

09:30

The Convener: Item 2 is correspondence from Graeme Dey MSP. He wrote to the committee expressing concern about the type and number of parliamentary motions that were being lodged to congratulate individuals or organisations. The committee previously considered his letter and requested more information relating to congratulatory motions.

The Scottish Parliament information centre has kindly prepared an analysis of the trends in the usage of motions that start with the phrase “That the Parliament congratulates”. The paper from the clerk provides more information on the rules that relate to the admissibility of motions.

I ask that members comment both on the report from SPICe, for which I thank it, and on the original correspondence from Graeme Dey. If it pleases the members who are here in person, I will turn to my deputy convener, who joins us online.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I have some brief comments. The analysis is interesting. It shows that there has been a significant increase in such motions up to the previous parliamentary session. The numbers do not appear to be getting higher in this parliamentary session; they may be tailing off a bit. That said, Mr Dey makes a reasonable point.

However, restricting the rights of MSPs to lodge motions of recognition for excellent work by volunteers, charities or organisations in their constituencies may lead to unintended consequences, and I would not want to restrict the opportunities to do that by making any changes to the procedures and protocols for lodging motions.

That said—I think that we had this discussion last time, convener—I get that placing a motion of recognition for a local good cause before the Parliament, and that having equal weight to, say, a motion that urges the Scottish or United Kingdom Government to do something significant in tackling the cost of living crisis or another matter of great public interest, may give rise to an issue about whether there is parity in the approach that the Parliament takes to each type of motion. However, I am not sure that we want to go down the road of a two-tier motion system. That would take a bit more thought.

In the future, we could potentially categorise motions and give them their own pathway in relation to how they are publicised, promoted and recognised by the Parliament, but I do not think

that we are there yet. I would be interested in how the rest of this session pans out, and I am open to your views, convener, on how we best take the matter forward.

The Convener: That is very helpful.

Stephen Kerr: I have a lot of sympathy for what Graeme Dey is getting at, but I agree completely with Bob Doris—in fact, I would go further. It would not be in order for us to prescribe what members should consider to be an appropriate motion to put before the Parliament. It has been suggested in private conversation that such motions may not look like much to those who sit in the Parliament, but they mean a great deal to the people who are their focus.

We should therefore leave things be. By all means, the committee can monitor the situation, but we should leave things be and let members get on. Members of the public can make up their own minds about the quality of motions and about whether they think that they go too far. Individual members must be self-governing and must make that choice for themselves, convener.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Like Stephen Kerr, I sympathise with what Graeme Dey's letter is about, but, for people who live rurally and remotely from this place, a motion is really beneficial, because they feel that they are being heard and that their work is valued, whether that is in relation to a charity or to local action that is being taken forward. We all have motions related to our cross-party groups as well. For example, today, I have a motion about world asthma day, and there will be a debate in the chamber about it. I know that not all motions are for debate—some are just to recognise or to congratulate something. Therefore, I would be keen to monitor the situation and see how we get on, but I would not like to prescribe to colleagues whether they should write motions in a particular way.

The Convener: That is very helpful. Alexander, would you like to add anything?

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The analysis is very useful in showing where we are and how we have progressed through the various parliamentary sessions to where we find ourselves at this point. As other members have indicated, there is a balance to strike in relation to motions, and that has been discussed in the past.

As others have said today, it is very important that members have the right to recognise individuals and organisations in our regions and constituencies. Giving that recognition to, for example, individual unsung heroes is a very valid part of our role. Other motions are largely supportive of other things that happen. I think that

the best way to describe it is that there are categories of motions. We might be the ones who lodge the motions, and it might be our staff who help to make that happen, but it is our constituents who receive the recognition.

Emma Harper's point about monitoring the situation, to see whether there is a surge in such motions, might be the best way to manage it. We have to acknowledge the work that the chamber desk team does to manage the number of motions that are submitted to it on a weekly basis. Analysis of that team's work might be useful to identify whether there have been changes that have helped the team members in dealing with the deluge of motions that come on a regular basis.

I am content that we continue as we are but that we also monitor the situation for the future, because I think that that would be useful.

The Convener: That is very helpful. Emma, do you want to come back in?

Emma Harper: Alexander Stewart mentioned the chamber desk team, which is a small team. Is it burdensome for the team members to manage motions? There are a lot of motions—some people would have certain things to say about motions that they might not find as valuable; we have covered that already—and I am interested in finding out whether that team feels burdened by having to process so many of them.

Stephen Kerr: On the back of that comment from Emma Harper, I go back to my principle, which is that members need to be free to lodge the motions that they feel are appropriate. If there is a problem with the chamber desk team—I am not sure that there is—we would have to rectify that from the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body or Parliamentary Bureau angle because, again, I think that members need to be free to do what they think is right and in the interests of their constituents. We have made the case that those motions, however other people might judge them, are very valuable for communities, organisations and individuals. To somehow have that censored, restricted or cancelled would be wholly inappropriate.

The Convener: Bob, I know that you would like to come back in.

Bob Doris: I will come back in briefly. I do not think that that is the intent behind Mr Dey's letter, but I concur with the views of Mr Kerr.

Emma Harper mentioned the chamber desk. The individuals who work in the chamber desk team are not just employees of Parliament—they have built up years of expertise and they will have seen patterns in relation to the content and nature of motions. I would very much appreciate their

views, as individual professionals, on how they think things have changed over the years.

I take on board Stephen's point. I would add that those team members might have views and innovative suggestions—without any intent to restrict their numbers—about how motions could be categorised differently. I am not saying that they should be in the public glare, because they are employees, but, should we return to the matter in the future, it would be quite helpful if we could capture some of their views and expertise.

The issue is for elected representatives to decide on, but I am conscious that we have significant expertise in the Parliament, and those parliamentary colleagues have seen fads in motions come and go, quite frankly, and are very close to how that has played out over many years. If we return to the matter, I would be quite keen to draw on the experience of the people who work diligently for us in the chamber desk team.

The Convener: That is very helpful. I thank the committee members for all their opinions on the issue. For a start, we need to understand that the motion is the vehicle that is used to bring any matter to the attention of those in Parliament, and I think that we are in agreement that there is a responsibility on individual MSPs. The standing orders are very clear on motions. They set out how a motion will be admissible rather than refer to their content or the expectation or hope that certain motions will come before the chamber.

A number of members have reflected on the importance to our constituents of Parliament recognising their work, whether or not that is in a congratulatory way. Emma Harper's comment about the cross-party groups is very important.

To go back to the analysis from SPICe, we are not that far away from the numbers increasing. Perhaps that is why, in actuality, some members felt concern. I hope that members will be reassured that we will undertake to monitor the situation over the next 12 months, to see whether we move away from that being the case. If we do not, that might be the trigger for us to return to the matter.

With regard to the chamber desk team, obviously, the expertise lies with the clerks who serve the chamber. I note Bob Doris's suggestion. If we were to consider an inquiry into the matter, we would, of course, seek evidence from all relevant and experienced bodies, to feed in their views.

However, at this stage, if the committee is content, I will write to Graeme Dey to thank him for expressing a concern, which is not just his concern, as other members have raised it, and to tell him that we will—I do not mean this to disparage the idea—take a watching brief, to see

whether this parliamentary session continues in the way that the previous sessions have, and that we will continue to monitor the effect on and use of the motions system. Are we content to do that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I am grateful. That being the last of the matters that we intend to deal with in public, I move the committee meeting into private session.

09:43

Meeting continued in private until 11:08.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot

