



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Minute of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) meeting held on Thursday 23 November 2023 at 9.00am

Present:

- Maggie Chapman MSP (chair)
- Claire Baker MSP
- Jackson Carlaw MSP
- Christine Grahame MSP

Apologies:

- Alison Johnstone MSP

In attendance:

- David McGill
 - Michelle Hegarty
 - Huw Williams, Janice Crerar
 - Judith Morrison, Kenny Htet-Khin, Eric MacLeod
 - Sara Glass, Willie Heigh
 - Mark Brough
 - Lisa Creamer
 - Judith Proudfoot, Secretary
- Rosemary Agnew, Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Previous minutes

1. The SPCB agreed the minutes of the meetings held on 9, 14 and 21 November 2023.

Matters arising

2. The SPCB agreed changes to the agenda to allow time for further discussion of roaming data charges.

Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme: disability provision – Paper 74

3. The SPCB agreed a request for travel costs to be met from the disability provision of the Scheme.

Security – Paper 75

4. The SPCB approved requests for security works to be undertaken at Members' local office and home addresses.

Chief Executive's Report

5. The SPCB noted the Report.

Meeting with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

6. As the funder of officeholders, the SPCB had instigated a series of meetings to engage with individual officeholders on an annual basis. The SPCB welcomed Rosemary Agnew, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, to the meeting.
7. The discussion with the Ombudsman covered a range of areas including: her priorities and strategic plan; the work lead by her on increasing the sharing of services between officeholders; changes being observed in the complaints landscape and how the additional resource provided by the SPCB had helped to reduce waiting times for complainants; and the proposed increasing number of officeholders and any role/impact on the Ombudsman's office of this expanding landscape. The Ombudsman closed by offering her office to meet with MSPs and/or their staff to help them understand the role of the Ombudsman so they could better inform and advise their constituents. She also highlighted their helpline and website as additional sources of information.
8. The SPCB thanked Rosemary for her attendance and for her insightful contribution to the discussions.

Roaming data charges

9. The SPCB discussed routes forward in light of Michael Matheson MSP's statement to the Parliament on 16 November.
10. The SPCB's primary responsibility was the provision of services and resources to support Members in carrying out their parliamentary duties. It

was a fundamental requirement of both the Members' Expenses Scheme and the SPCB's policy on MSPs' Use of Resources that these were for parliamentary purposes. The SPCB agreed that an investigation should be undertaken in line with its duties under the Code of Conduct for MSPs. This would consider whether certain data roaming charges incurred by Mr Matheson met the requirements of the Scheme and whether SPCB resources had been used in accordance with SPCB policies.

11. The SPCB commissioned officials to finalise the process to be followed. The SPCB also agreed to issue a further statement ahead of the SPCB Question Time later that day.

Officeholder budgets – Paper 73

12. As part of its 2024/25 budget bid process, the SPCB considered the budget bids, including contingency requests and a staffing bid, received from each of the officeholders and noted as follows:

- Scottish Public Services Ombudsman – content
- Scottish Information Commissioner – content
- Children and Young People Commissioner for Scotland – content
- Scottish Human Rights Commission – content with core bid but noted that any anticipated additional work resulting from new legislation in the coming year should initially be funded by the Scottish Government and therefore not included in the SPCB's 2024-25 budget bid.
- Ethical Standards Commissioner – content
- Standards Commission for Scotland – content
- Electoral Commission – the SPCB was due to meet with the Commission later in the month to discuss.
- Scottish Biometrics Commissioner – content on the understanding that the requested secondee would be for a 2-year fixed term.

13. The SPCB also noted the following in relation to new and proposed officeholders:

13.1 The Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Act was passed in September 2023 and with effect from 1 April 2025, funding for this new officeholder would form part of the SPCB's overall budget.

13.2 In addition, the Victims, Witnesses & Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, was introduced in October 2023 which provides for an independent Victim's Commissioner who would be supported by the SPCB. If the Bill is passed, funding for this new officeholder would form part of the SPCB's overall budget from 1 April 2026.

13.3 There was also the potential for three new commissioners through proposed Members' Bills – a disability commissioner, an older persons' commissioner and a sustainable development and wellbeing

commissioner. Funding for these officeholders, if the Bills were passed by Parliament, would also require to be met by the SPCB.

2024 Festival of Politics – Paper 72

14. This item was deferred to a future meeting.

Resource allocation for 2024-25 and future years

15. The SPCB had a further discussion on the proposed budget for 2024-25 and the indicative figures for 2025-26. The SPCB agreed the indices to be used for Members' pay and the staff cost provision and noted an outline of other parliamentary service costs including planned project expenditure.

16. A paper with the final budget bid would be brought to the next meeting for approval ahead of it being submitted to the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

Date of next meeting

17. The next meeting of the SPCB was scheduled for 7 December 2023.

SPCB Secretariat
November 2023