



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Conveners Group

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Annual Report of the Conveners Group 2023-24



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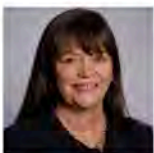
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Introduction

1. This first annual report of the Conveners Group will provide an update on work undertaken in the Parliamentary year 2023/24, progress towards achieving the Group's strategic priorities, as well as highlighting the scrutiny activity of other Parliamentary committees.
2. The Conveners Group is made up of Conveners from each of the Parliament's 15 committees and is Chaired by one of the Deputy Presiding Officers. The Group has six primary functions set out in [Standing Orders](#). These are to:
 - consider and make recommendations in connection with the operation of committees;
 - report to and be consulted by the Parliamentary Bureau on questions regarding competence under Rule 6.13;
 - report to and be consulted by the Parliamentary Bureau on any decision on joint consideration by committees under Rule 6.14;
 - decide with the Parliamentary Bureau on the approval of the place in Scotland of a committee meeting in accordance with Rule 12.3.2;
 - decide with the Parliamentary Bureau on the approval of travel by a committee member outwith the United Kingdom in accordance with Rule 12.10; and
 - refer matters to the Parliamentary Bureau, a committee or the Parliamentary corporation where it considers it appropriate to do so.
3. However, at the start of session 6, the Group agreed to take a more proactive role when it comes to scrutiny of systematic issues, including championing innovative forms of scrutiny. As such, it agreed to progress the following four strategic priorities:
 - a) Cross committee working, with an initial focus on Net Zero and Post-EU issues.
 - b) Participation, diversity and inclusion
 - c) Post legislative scrutiny
 - d) Supporting Members as parliamentarians: continuous professional development for Members
4. These priorities and actions to achieving them are set out in more detail in the following sections.

The Strategic priorities

Cross committee working

5. The Group acknowledges that policy areas and remits have become increasingly complex over the last 20 years. The cross-cutting nature of public policy means there are many areas of scrutiny which would benefit from a cross-committee perspective. The need for cooperation and coordination is therefore important for a number of reasons, including: avoiding unnecessary duplication; ensuring that issues do not fall between different remits and making sure that policy is considered in a holistic way, rather than through a departmental silo.
6. Focusing on session-wide issues has been key to the Group's success in addressing this priority. At the outset, the Group identified net zero and post-EU scrutiny as areas that impact on most, if not all, committee remits. The Group progress on each of these issues is set out below:

Net Zero

7. Climate change is a complex scientific, socio-economic and environmental issue and an amplifier of many of the challenges illustrated by the global [Sustainable Development Goals](#). Research indicates that tackling climate change will require alignment of policy and spend across a vast number of policies to achieve a just transition. This is a significant challenge as most policy areas contribute to greenhouse gas emissions or are impacted by climate change.
8. The Conveners Group recognised that effective and impactful scrutiny of climate change and net zero would require collaborative and cross-cutting scrutiny across parliamentary committees and agreed a strategic priority on net zero scrutiny for session 6 to deliver this.

Actions agreed

9. In [June 2022](#) the Conveners Group agreed seven initial actions, outlined in the infographic below. These actions were agreed in the context that the [Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee](#) (NZET) Committee plays a leading role, and supports other committees to effectively embed climate scrutiny in their own work.



Progress/Impact

10. Through the Conveners Group strategic priority, the Scottish Parliament has been able to provide bespoke support to MSPs, their staff and SPS staff to support scrutiny of climate change across committee portfolios and enable a step-change in scale of activity.
11. This work has been rolled out through new resource to [develop and deliver a model for parliamentary scrutiny of climate change](#). This includes more front-line research expertise, a focused project management approach, access across committees to an external climate change / net zero adviser, a secondment from the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) to aid innovation and delivery and embed monitoring of impact. It also includes external resource through a partnership with the four universities in Scotland who hold UKRI Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Account funding, to fund a Knowledge Exchange Manager to extend and diversify use of academic evidence and expertise on climate change.
12. Specific outcomes to June 2024 include:
 - **Enhanced awareness of the relevance of climate change and engagement with it across parliamentary work.** Including through bespoke on-demand tailored support, published research on the relevance of climate change to the policy areas of five subject committees, and activities to integrate climate change and net zero to cross-cutting work by SPICe and Scotland's Futures Forum.
 - **Strengthened connections between the Scottish Parliament and strategic partners on climate change.** Including the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC), who have provided evidence to the Conveners Group on an annual basis and provided regular evidence to the NZET Committee.

- **Enhanced capacity of MSPs, MSP staff and parliamentary staff to scrutinise climate change across different areas of work.** Including through bespoke on-demand tailored support, as well as over 30 events, seminars, workshops and structured learning opportunities.
- **Improved coordination of cross-cutting scrutiny of climate change.** Including through supporting cross-parliament communication on climate change and net zero issues and integrating work with other key priorities and programmes across the Parliament.
- **Improved access to diverse academic evidence and expertise on climate change.** Including through piloting adaptations to existing knowledge exchange processes to solicit research and expertise for Committee and other parliamentary work and in the production of research on the relevance of climate change to the policy areas across subject committees.
- **Improved processes for participative engagement on climate change.** Including piloting processes to enhance public engagement and participation, through a People's Panel to support NZET's post-legislative scrutiny of section 91 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.
- **Climate and environmental "lens" applied to parliamentary oversight** across legislative, budget and policy scrutiny. Includes through continued roll out of the Scottish Parliament's innovative Sustainable Development Impact Assessment (SDIA) Tool in scrutiny, enabling a sustainable development lens to be applied to scrutiny of the draft Land Reform Bill.
- **Consideration of how parliamentary processes and procedure enable improved scrutiny coherence on climate change.** Including analysis and initial discussion on the quality of information provided by the Scottish Government on sustainable development provided in Policy Memorandums accompanying Scottish Parliament Bills.
- **Increased awareness of the model for parliamentary scrutiny of climate change.** Through activities to reciprocally share learnings and best practice, including events in collaboration with GLOBE International at COP28 and close collaboration with the UK Parliament and other devolved legislatures.

13. A full update on progress in delivering the specific Actions and the wider model for parliamentary scrutiny of climate change was provided to Conveners Group in June 2024.

Next steps

- The next 12 months will see continued work to deliver the Conveners Group agreed actions and to build the wider model for parliamentary scrutiny, including:
- Specific support to the NZET committee to undertake scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Bill, announced on 18 April 2024, which seeks to revise the

timetable for achieving net zero by 2045 and introduce a new approach, based on 5-yearly carbon budgets.

- Specific support to the NZET Committee in advance of the draft Climate Change Plan (CCP), to facilitate NZET taking a leading role in coordinating scrutiny across committees. This includes delivering a framework of support available to all committees to support their engagement with the CCP.
 - Continuing to provide support to enable Committees to embed climate change considerations into planned work and to deal with reactive and ad-hoc approaches from MSPs, committee clerks and others to support their approach to climate scrutiny.
 - Targeted work to embed innovative approaches to expand and diversify engagement with academic research and expertise on climate change, including piloting an Area of Research Interest.
 - Supporting the Scottish Parliament to collaborate more strategically with public and charitable sector research funders and Higher Education Institutes in the area of climate change, including working with the SPICe academic engagement team to develop and refine guidance, resources and training for researchers on engaging with the Scottish Parliament and other legislatures.
 - Further developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks for knowledge exchange work on climate change in the Scottish Parliament, drawing on best practice.
 - Continuing discussions with UKRI-ESRC on options for future collaboration.
 - Further activities to raise awareness of relevance of climate change and embed engagement with it across parliamentary work, including SPICe support to the 'Parliament of the Future' Programme across the Scottish Parliament and to the revision of the Clerking Manual.
 - Continuing to share learning with other legislatures in the UK and globally on these issues, including continuing collaborations with the UK Parliament Thematic Research Lead on Climate and Environment.
14. Given that climate change and net zero will remain political and societal priority issues, the opportunity exists for Conveners Group to continue to provide a framework for enhanced scrutiny and understanding across the Scottish Parliament towards and through session 7.

Post-EU issues

15. The Group agreed to provide a leadership role to enable committees to carry out effective scrutiny of post-EU issues. Following the departure from the EU, the devolved landscape is complex and requires clear leadership in order to navigate these complexities. Post-EU issues are also core to the Parliament as a whole, particularly in relation to its scrutiny role and how it can properly hold

government decision-making to account. The Group agreed it has a key role to play here.

Actions agreed

16. The Group agreed an Action Plan in relation to the development and implementation of new scrutiny arrangements to support post-EU scrutiny. Key priorities have been enhanced scrutiny of the Scottish Government's policy to align with EU law, use of the powers within the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act and Inter-governmental relations.

Progress/Impact

17. Significant progress has been achieved in delivering new scrutiny arrangements in a number of post-EU areas. For example, agreement has been reached with Scottish Ministers on the level of information to be provided on the impact of the Scottish Government's commitment to align with EU law when introducing legislation. This applies to primary legislation, Scottish Statutory Instruments, and Legislative Consent Memorandums (LCMs). The same agreement also set out that information on the UK Internal Market Act 2020 should be provided for Bills, SSIs and LCMs. Agreement has also been reached with regards to Ministerial reporting on the use of the REUL Act powers and the Scottish Government's role in the UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement Partnership Council and Specialised Committees.

Next steps

18. A number of post-EU scrutiny issues remain outstanding in relation to UK Ministers legislating in devolved areas using delegated powers, reporting on Common Frameworks and the operation of the process to consider exclusions to the market access principles in the UK Internal Market Act 2020. The CEEAC Committee has agreed to seek an early response from the new UK Government, following the UK General Election, on its recommendations in these areas in its How Devolution is Changing Post-EU report. External Research has also been commissioned by the Committee jointly with the Scottish Government on the operation of the IGR Written Agreement prior to a wider review of the Parliament's scrutiny of IGR.

Participation, Diversity and Inclusion

19. The participation, diversity and inclusion strategic priority aims to enhance scrutiny by hearing from a wider range of voices in committee work.

Actions agreed/progress & impact

20. The Group agreed to actions under a number of headings – progress is summarised under each heading.
 - **An annual participation evaluation report** to allow the Group to take stock of progress and gaps in committee public participation. The first report was presented in May 2024 and demonstrated extensive public participation in

committee work, by a diverse range of people using a variety of methods including visits, focus groups, conferences, lived experience panels, a randomly selected people's panel and online engagement using digital tools. This was delivered working with 124 partner organisations who helped to connect committees with participants and design appropriate engagement activities. Measuring the diversity of witnesses in formal committee meetings continues to be challenging, however, with low survey responses meaning it has not been possible to establish a robust monitoring baseline.

- **Overcoming time/place barriers to participation:** One of the challenges in making participation opportunities available to the public is the availability of members at times/locations which are most likely to attract public participants. One option to address this is to facilitate participation without members present which is then reported back to the committee. Two examples this year – scrutiny of the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill and post-legislative scrutiny of the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act – involved substantial public participation largely without members present and the feedback from participants and committee members suggests that both made effective contributions to scrutiny.
- **Payment for participation policy:** Among people from groups who are underrepresented in the work of the Parliament, those who also have a low income are most likely to be underrepresented. One way of addressing this is through offering financial incentives to participate. The Group endorsed a payment for participation policy outlining the circumstances in which financial incentives would be offered, as well as pointing to alternative ways of valuing public contributions. The policy was subsequently agreed by the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body and came into effect on 1 April 2024.
- **Accessibility:** Languages and formats have an important role in increasing the reach of committee calls for views and reports by allowing people to provide responses in formats and languages that work for them. This year 7 calls for views have been made BSL accessible and we are currently testing an approach to simplify the submission of responses in BSL by using WhatsApp. There has been increased use of easy read calls for views (for adults with learning disabilities) and the first ever call for views in Scots for the consultation on the Scottish Languages Bill.
- **Involving children and young people:** The Group agreed the importance of embedding UNCRC principles in committee work, noting that the Act incorporating UNCRC comes into force on 16 July 2025. A broad network of organisations working with children and young people has been established to advise on and support greater participation by children and young people in the work of Parliament.
- **Trauma-informed practice:** The Group agreed a statement of commitment to trauma-informed working which can be shared with partner organisations when working on potentially traumatic topics, with vulnerable people or with under 18s. Committee agendas over the past year have provided significant opportunities to develop our approaches to working on highly sensitive topics,

including safe access zones and the experiences of victims of sexual crime in the justice system and this has been warmly welcomed by participants.

- **Deliberative democracy:** The Parliament last year endorsed the CPPP Committee's report recommending a pathway to embed deliberative democracy in the work of Parliament, including running two pilot people's panels. The Group has endorsed a set of principles for identifying suitable topics for panels and has used these to guide selection of the two pilot panels, one on post-legislative scrutiny of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act which took place in late 2023, and one on a policy issue which will take place in autumn 2024.
- **Gender sensitive scrutiny:** The Group agreed to development work to implement the recommendations of the Gender Sensitive Audit on gender sensitive scrutiny. Practical guidance has been drafted for clerking teams and SPICe to ensure that, when they are approaching scrutiny of a bill or inquiry, they are able to do so in a gender sensitive way.

Next steps

21. The Group has agreed a number of actions for next year which will be evaluated as part of next year's participation report to the Group:

- Steps to encourage higher response rates to the witness diversity survey to allow us to establish a baseline for future monitoring
- Explore the potential of making more use of committee reporters to overcome time/place barriers to participation.
- Use the Presiding Officer's programme of community visits, as well as committee opportunities, to explore ways of involving the public more in committee agenda setting and shaping inquiries.
- A review of languages and format policy to further increase the accessibility of committee materials.
- Progress the embedding of UNCRC principles in committee work, drawing on the working in partnership agreements with the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children's Parliament, on the Young Women Lead programme's work on democratic wellbeing and on committee experiences of engaging children and young people.
- Develop training for Members and staff on trauma-informed working; guidance for officials on trauma-informed approaches to witnesses; and further develop our risk assessment processes and the potential use of content warnings for some committee business.
- Evaluate the use of deliberative democracy once the second pilot panel is complete and contribute to the CPPPC's work on a participation blueprint for session 7.

- Review the effectiveness of the guidance on gender sensitive scrutiny and draw on the learning from the external research that has been commissioned to identify effective practice across committees.

Post legislative scrutiny

22. The purpose of the Conveners Group priority on Post-Legislative Scrutiny (PLS) is to take forward a series of measures to promote greater uptake of PLS inquiries by parliamentary committees to review certain pieces of legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament to see if they are having the effect originally intended or whether reform is needed.

Actions agreed

23. The Conveners Group will achieve this purpose by:

- Encouraging committees to consider ideas for PLS inquiries alongside other pieces of work at business planning days, including through clerks and SPICe suggesting possible topics.
- Developing tools to help committees identify when a current bill being scrutinised would benefit from future PLS review and identifying what data or information will need to be collected to inform any review.
- Ensuring that the current work on PLS is more findable on the Parliament's website and thereby promoting our PLS activity to a wider audience, including other parliaments around the world.
- Developing training courses and guidance for committee staff and researchers to raise understanding of what PLS is and how it benefits the Parliament and wider public.

Progress/Impact

24. Although relatively early days, the measures taken have seen a significant increase in the number of PLS inquiries conducted this parliamentary session compared to previous ones.

25. The Scottish Parliament has also been working with the Parliaments of Albania, Malawi, Zambia, Nepal and Sweden to discuss improving PLS activity in our respective legislatures.

Next steps

26. The emphasis is now on sustaining this growth in PLS activity through the rest of this parliamentary session and into session 7. An academic fellow, Dr Tom Caygill of Nottingham Trent University, has been commissioned to review the progress being made and advise on future ideas for any legacy report from the Conveners Group.

Continuous professional development for Members

27. The purpose of this strategic priority is to consider how Members can be best supported in their scrutiny role, through the provision of training, support and other continuous professional development (CPD).

Actions agreed

28. The Conveners Group agreed a set of principles informing the delivery of training and CPD, including embedding CPD into committee business planning days and delivering CPD on a needs-led basis. The Group also agreed that it is important to build CPD into the consideration of its other strategic priorities, such as net zero scrutiny; other cross-cutting issues such as human rights and budget scrutiny should also form part of CPD.

Progress/Impact

29. A comprehensive induction programme was delivered at the start of session 6 and CPD opportunities have been made available throughout the session (for example, training on legislation and on budget scrutiny).

Next steps

30. Over the coming year, the Group will consider plans for induction for session 7. The Group will also continue to consider how CPD can be offered to Members on an ongoing basis for the remainder of the session, in line with its agreed principles.

Work of Parliamentary committees

31. This section details some of the work that has been undertaken by each of the Parliament's committee in 2023/24, focusing on individual areas of innovation or impactful scrutiny. Each of the committees annual reports can be found on the [Parliament's report website](#).

Citizen Participation & Public Petitions Committee

Hybrid and community engagement

32. Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee highlighted four petitions in its annual report to demonstrate the varied nature of its work and the range of outcomes the Committee can deliver for petitioners. The work of note includes hybrid business with petitioners from Uist and community engagement with victims of youth violence in Glasgow. The case studies also reflected the Committee's focus on putting people's concerns directly to decision makers and its ability to successfully press the Scottish Government to take meaningful action in response to petitions.

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs & Culture Committee

External visits to understand good practice and any barriers to culture in communities

33. In addition to holding a series of evidence sessions for its culture in communities inquiry, the Committee undertook three external engagement visits to community arts organisations based in Edinburgh, Dumfries, and Orkney, with the support of the Parliament's Participation and Communities Team (PACT). The aim of the visits was to gain an understanding of good practice and any barriers to place-based cultural policy and cultural participation within communities across Scotland.

Criminal Justice Committee

Phased approach to Bill scrutiny

34. The Committee adopted a novel approach to its scrutiny of the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill. The Committee agreed it would be important to take time to consider all the main provisions in the Bill in a thorough and balanced way. However, the size and multi-purpose nature of the Bill was a challenge. For example, time constraints meant it would not have been realistic to ask a panel of witnesses questions about all the proposals in the Bill in a single evidence session. For this reason, the Committee took a novel 'phased' approach to its consideration of the Bill. It divided the Bill into more manageable segments for the purposes of Stage 1 and considered these separately, one after the other, in relation to the various Parts of the Bill. This meant that there was 'ring-fenced' time for the scrutiny of each of the main provisions and the evidence sessions were more focused.

Delegated Powers & Law Reform Committee

Cross-committee working

35. The Committee took oral evidence on the Regulation of Legal Services Bill and worked closely with stakeholders and the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee to make recommendations in relation to the delegated powers which the Scottish Government has accepted and which is expected to lead to significant alternations to the Bill.

Economy & Fair Work Committee

Use of technology to enhance witness participation

36. For the Committee's Disability Employment Gap inquiry, it worked closely with Public Engagement Service and Broadcasting teams to ensure that a deaf witness was able to engage with the Committee through the use of Speech-to-Text Reporters. Questions and responses were transcribed in real time, allowing instant participation. This is the first time that this technology has been used in the Scottish Parliament.

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Committee scrutiny of the costings for the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill

37. Although supportive of the general principles of the Children (Care and Justice) Bill, the Committee stressed the need for more accurate and fuller costings. To ensure that it had a better sense of how the Bill would be implemented, the Committee decided to take more evidence at two meetings ahead of Stage 2. This drew out updated costings from the Scottish Government, increasing the costs for the Bill by at least 50% compared to the original figures contained in the Financial Memorandum. The Committee's scrutiny also led the Scottish Government to ask for Stage 2 of the Bill to be postponed, to allow it more time to engage with Committee Members, and develop amendments to the Bill. The Committee considered 221 amendments at Stage 2, over the course of the three meetings.

Equalities, Human Rights & Civil Justice Committee

Hearing from lived experience in pre-budget scrutiny

38. The Committee agreed a three-year pre-budget scrutiny plan to look at each principle of human rights budgeting in turn: participation in year 1, transparency in year 2 and accountability in year 3. Therefore in this reporting year the focus was on participation.
39. As part of that scrutiny, and to run alongside formal scrutiny, the Committee agreed to explore the impact of the budget from a lived experience perspective.
40. The Committee took part in a deliberative workshop session with a citizens panel of participants from the Whole Family Equality Project (WFEP) who are supported by Capital City Partnership. The session focussed on barriers to participation and what more the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament could do to improve this.
41. The Committee concluded its evidence taking on pre-budget by taking formal evidence from some of the citizen panel members on their deliberation process and priorities. The main aim was to focus on specific questions that the Committee members could then put directly, word for word, to the then Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees who was attending to give evidence directly after the citizens' panel.

Finance & Public Administration Committee

Enhancing transparency of budget documentation

42. The committee has achieved significant gains in relation to making budget documentation more transparent, e.g. the Committee repeated its recommendation that the Scottish Government adopts a similar approach to that of the UK Government and the SFC in comparing new plans for spending with estimates or outturns from the previous year. In response, the Scottish

Government, for the first time, published this information alongside the Scottish Budget 2024-25. The FPAC continues to work with the Scottish Government in further enhancing fiscal transparency.

Health, Social Care & Sport Committee

Innovative post legislative scrutiny

43. The Committee agreed an innovative two-phase approach to its post-legislative scrutiny of self-directed support with phase one focused on information gathering and phase two focused on developing recommendations for future implementation of the Act, informed by analysis of the evidence gathered during phase one:

- Phase 1 to be undertaken between October 2023 - February 2024
- Phase 2 to be undertaken March 2024 onwards

44. The Committee established an informal stakeholder reference group to help determine the focus of Phase 1 of the inquiry. As a result, the Committee engaged with stakeholders during an informal briefing, issued a call for written evidence, and developed and delivered five engagement workstreams using a deliberative democracy approach.

Local Government, Housing & Planning Committee

Use of people's panels to inform bill scrutiny

45. The Committee made its first use of 'people's panels' during its pre-legislative scrutiny of housing issues, ahead of the Scottish Government's introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. One panel consisted of tenants and the other of landlords. Participants were appointed to the panels in such a way as to ensure that they represented the interests of people across Scotland, enabling the Committee to better understand the complexities of the rental sector across Scotland and in turn apply better scrutiny to the Housing Bill. The Committee has since met with members of both Panels about their conclusions, to help inform its ongoing scrutiny of the Bill at Stage 1.

Net Zero, Energy & Transport Committee

People's Panel to support post-legislative scrutiny

46. The Committee established a People's Panel to support its post-legislative scrutiny of section 91 of the [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#). The Panel was comprised of twenty-three members of the public that were broadly a cross-section of Scotland's population. The Panel was tasked by the Committee with considering two questions:

- How effective has the Scottish Government been at engaging the public on climate change and Scotland's climate change targets?; and
- What else (if anything) could the Scottish Government do to inform and involve the public to help meet Scotland's climate change targets?

47. The Panel published a report [on 11 April 2024](#) presenting 18 conclusions and recommendations for the Committee on how the Scottish Government can improve public engagement on climate change. The Committee has agreed to discuss the Panel's findings with the Scottish Government ahead of the Scottish Government's mid-term review of the public engagement strategy.

Public Audit Committee

Cross committee working on the Climate Change Plan

48. The Committee took evidence from the Auditor General on the section 23 report, and the Scottish Government on its Major Capital Projects update, focusing on the programmes and projects falling under the "Enabling the transition to Net Zero emissions and environmental sustainability" theme of the Infrastructure Investment Plan. It then took evidence from the Scottish Government's Director-General Net Zero on issues arising from both evidence sessions.
49. At the time of the Committee's scrutiny, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) Committee was in the process of co-ordinating Parliamentary scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft Climate Change Plan (CCP) with other subject committees. The Committee therefore wrote to the NZET Committee setting out the key issues arising from the evidence sessions. While scrutiny of the CCP does not fall within the Public Audit Committee's remit, it was able to contribute to that work and support Parliamentary scrutiny of the CCP, though its scrutiny of the section 23 report and the Major Capital Projects update.

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

Hearing from lived experience for the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill

50. The Committee held a consultative event with approximately 40 farmers, crofters, other land managers and representatives from rural community and development organisations on 19 February 2024. The purpose of the consultation was to engage directly with agricultural practitioners to hear their views about future agriculture policy and the Bill. Delivery of this event involved a collaborative approach between the Committee's clerks, the Parliament's Participation and Communities Team, and SPICe. The contributions made by participants at the event helped to inform the questions posed by members in an evidence session with the Cabinet Secretary and shaped several of the recommendations within the Committee's Stage 1 report.

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Cross-committee scrutiny of the efforts in Scotland to reduce the number of deaths from the misuse of drugs

51. As part of a joined-up approach to tackle drug harm, the Criminal Justice, Health, Social Care and Sport, and Social Justice and Social Security Committees have met jointly since February 2022, to consider the efforts being made to reduce drug deaths. This approach reflects the need to consider aspects of the criminal

justice system, as well as health policies and wider social and economic matters such as poverty, unemployment, unstable housing, and family breakdown. Members of the three committees met three times during the reporting year. They met on 26 September and 2 November 2023, and on 1 May 2024. An issue which the Members of the three committees considered from the outset was the proposed introduction of safer drug consumption facilities in Scotland. In particular, the proposal for a safer drug consumption facility pilot in Glasgow. On 11 September 2023, the Lord Advocate wrote to the cross-committee members, as follows: “I can confirm that were a facility, of the type described in the documents which I have been provided with, to open as a pilot in Glasgow, then I would be prepared to publish a statement of prosecution policy to the effect that it would not be in the public interest to prosecute users of that facility in terms of section 5 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 for simple possession offences committed within the confines of the facility”.

Standards, Procedures & Public Appointments Committee

Review of proxy voting trial

52. The Committee conducted an evaluation of the Parliament’s proxy voting pilot in advance of the pilot’s conclusion in December 2023. The evaluation included consideration of data on usage of the pilot scheme, a survey to all members seeking their views on the pilot along with correspondence to the Parliamentary Bureau, all party groups and the Presiding Officer.
53. The majority of respondents to the Committee’s consultation were supportive of the proxy voting system. The Committee considered that the pilot proxy voting system had been used appropriately and proportionately since its introduction.
54. Following the evaluation the Committee concluded that it wished to recommend to the Parliament that a permanent rule change to enable proxy voting be introduced. This came into effect on 22 December 2023

