

PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU

COMMITTEE REQUEST TO MEET DURING PLENARY

Introduction

1. The Parliamentary Bureau is invited to consider a request from the Public Audit Committee to meet at the same time as General Questions on Thursday 28 April 2022. The purpose of this meeting is to hold an additional oral evidence session with the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) on his recent report on New vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides. Also scheduled for that meeting is an oral evidence session with the Accountable Officer for NHS Highland on the 2020/21 audit of NHS Highland section 22 report, as well as a discussion in private on the Committee's work programme.

Background to Request

2. The Committee's work programme is largely informed by the reports published by the AGS. In recent weeks, this has included the consideration of reports on a wide range of issues including the NHS in Scotland, drug and alcohol services in Scotland and social care. At last week's meeting, the Committee took evidence from the AGS on his high-profile report on the new vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides. Given the significance of the issues and volume of detail in the report, the Committee has agreed to take further evidence from the AGS on 28 April.
3. The AGS intends to publish a number of other important reports between now and June 2022. This includes the report published last week on serious governance concerns at South Lanarkshire College. Further imminent reports include the progress the Scottish Government has made on managing the delivery of its devolved social security powers and the public sector's financial response to Covid-19.
4. Consideration of these reports, coupled with the Committee's continuation of its scrutiny on a number of other AGS reports, means that considerable demands will be placed on Members up until the summer recess. A number of recent items of written evidence and other items of correspondence have also been received and require detailed consideration by the Committee to inform its work programme. This therefore places further and more immediate pressures on the Committee's capacity.
5. In line with other committees, the Committee has decided not to meet on the day of the local government elections, Thursday 5 May 2022. In addition, the Office of the Clerk is closed on Thursday 2 June, as a result of the Spring Bank Holiday. This means that the Committee will lose two opportunities to meet between now and the summer recess.

6. The clerks have explored the option to meet out with the Committee's usual meeting slot, to try and alleviate some of these workload pressures. Due to committee meeting clashes however, this is not possible. While the Committee has also previously explored the option to meet earlier than its usual 8.30am pre-brief start time, it is recognised that this option may not be in line with the Parliament's commitment to family-friendly working, including for witnesses, staff and the public.
7. The time available on a Thursday morning often presents challenges to the Committee in making progress with its work programme. This is usually overcome by adhering to strict timings during the meeting. It is therefore anticipated that requests of this nature will be uncommon. However, the current substantial programme of upcoming work for the Committee, combined with the reduced number of meetings available between now and summer recess means that the Committee's immediate capacity is significantly reduced.

Decision

8. Business Managers are therefore invited to consider the Public Audit Committee's request and to recommend to the Parliament that the Committee be given permission to meet at the same time as the Chamber during General Questions on Thursday 28 April.

Parliamentary Business Team
April 2022