

Commission on Parliamentary Reform

“Your Parliament Your Voice” Lunch and learn event held jointly with Aberdeen CVO

Tuesday 28 February 2017

We asked: How can the Scottish Parliament engage more effectively with you?

You said:

There is a need to increase the awareness of the role of MSPs and the Scottish Parliament.

Other matters discussed included –

- It was agreed it is important people understand the difference between the role of Parliament and the role of Government. However it was felt there was a lack of knowledge over the difference between a MSP and a MP. If people understood they can speak to MSPs, party spokespersons and Ministers on legislation issues it would empower them to be more vocal.
- When people have concerns about issues it can be complicated to work out exactly who to contact with the different layers of power (councillors, MSPs, MPs etc.) especially where responsibility is split between the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament. This can mean people waste their time contacting the wrong person leading to unnecessary stress and complications.
- MSPs should have a role to inform people in their constituencies about the role of the Scottish Parliament and how it operates.
- The more people get involved and take ownership of decisions it will demystify the role of the MSP.

There was discussion on the way the Scottish Parliament engages with people:

- People’s experience of engaging with the Scottish Parliament has been mixed. It can be difficult for people to use the website to find the correct person/team to contact. This can be especially true when contacting on a policy area as people need to know which committee has responsibility for it, and this can be difficult to work out.
- There was concern expressed regarding the continuity between sessions when an MSP loses their seat. Vulnerable people who have been communicating with an MSP and their staff can find their details and case history are not passed to the new MSP, especially if they are from a different party.

- It was suggested the Scottish Parliament doesn't often come to Aberdeen to speak to people and engage them in the decision making process. Therefore the Parliament should make more of an effort to get out of the central belt and engage with groups and people about matters that impact their life. This feeds into the general feeling of centralisation and more powers being moved away from the North East.
- Scottish Parliament committees should be looking at legislation that has been passed and seeking the views of people from throughout Scotland on how the policies have impacted their lives.
- Between the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and committees people are asked to give their opinions on a large number of consultations. People therefore don't always understand exactly what they are responding to, and what impact it will have. This can lead to frustration and a feeling that the consultations are no more than a box ticking exercise.
- Having a fair and open Parliament that listens to the views of people throughout Scotland can reassure communities that the Parliament is there to look after their best interests.
- How Parliament has come to the decisions it has made are not well communicated to local communities.
- Often Community Councils and Groups are asked to comment on a wide range of legislation and inquiries; however they have to prioritise when to provide a response as they do not have the time/resources to reply to everything. Often this means they will respond on issues that will directly impact their communities. Parliament should therefore do more to support smaller groups and communities to have their voice.
- Parliament could work closer with Third Sector organisations to provide support and education on the role of the Parliament, and how decisions made at a national level impact people's lives at a local level.
- Parliament and Committees should consider when they do hold meetings outside of Edinburgh that they are on issues that affect the people in that area and the meetings are held at suitable times to allow as many people as possible to attend.
- Cross Party groups are an approachable way for people to engage with Parliament and can be a good way to bring people into the Parliament.

We asked: What are the main recommendations the Commission should make to the Scottish Parliament?

You said:

- A Pensioners Parliament should be set up to represent the views of older people.

- The Scottish Parliament should get out of the central belt and into communities throughout Scotland. This will allow people to see the decisions aren't just made at Holyrood.
- The Scottish Parliament should do more to provide information to people on the role of Parliament and re-examine the language used as this can be a barrier for people engaging.
- The Scottish Parliament should have wider exposure on the main channels on TV – possibly having their own TV programme such as 'meet the MSPs'.
- Closer working with local groups and councils when engaging with people.
- Parliament should be more transparent.
- Parliament should enable people to be involved when they want to and have different ways for you to contact the Parliament.
- The Parliament is not just one building but is for the country – should be more effort to show MSPs working together for the good of the community.