

## **Commission on Parliamentary Reform**

### **Scottish Environment Link event**

**Monday 20 February 2017**

#### **We asked: How can the Parliament improve how it works?**

#### **You said:**

S E Link has been considering its experiences of working with the Scottish Parliament and the Commission's work is therefore timely.

Much of what the Parliament's does is successful such as the Public Petitions system, how it engages with organisations such as S E Link and the access organisations have to speak with the MSPs, Committees and Parliament.

However there are some areas for improvement which S E Link will set out in more detail in its submission to the Commission's call for views.

There was a discussion about the extent to which legislation has detrimentally impacted on the Committees and Parliament ability to undertake inquiry work and on the limited resources available to Committees to undertake scrutiny of policy areas. In discussing the Consultative Steering Group's (CSG) ambitions for the Scottish Parliament, the CSG vision that no one party should dominate the Parliament had not been realised. In that regard there was a suggestion that a stronger role for the Presiding Officer in responding to the volume of legislation should be explored.

In relation to legislation possible options for improvement could include the addition in Bill documents of a clear statement about the purpose of the Bill (adopting the European approach) which would bring benefits in terms of enabling preliminary debate, provide focus when balancing competing demands for evidence and assist with legal interpretation.

There was a discussion about Committees and their effectiveness, much of which will feature in the written views of S E Link. In general it was felt Committees hadn't been as powerful or as independent as was originally proposed by the CSG. As such the written views from S E Link will suggest some ways that Committees could be strengthened such as refocussing their remits (and how well they meet the needs of cross cutting issues) and more resources. International comparisons would provide some helpful insight.

It was highlighted that the Parliament needs to seek a better balance between scrutiny of short term and long term issues.

There was discussion about how MSPs are elected and that proportional representation hadn't made as much a difference to the political culture as had been thought such that the culture remained comparable to the House of Commons.

The written views of S E Link will also include comments on the involvement of Scottish civic society in the Parliament's work and the role civic society can play (noting the role of the previous Civic Forum).

Was there sufficient think tank capacity in Scotland was also commented upon with some suggestion that more independent capacity was needed. It was noted that the independence referendum had led to some current think tanks being perceived as being associated with one side or the other of the referendum.

There was discussion about how the Parliament might work with external groups to enhance those groups' (and the people they may represent) contribution to scrutiny.

The impact of legislation on workload of the Parliament was commented on, as was the need for more post legislative scrutiny and on the extent to which existing legislation has been implemented effectively.

How MSPs might be better supported was also discussed and that MSPs see their constituency work as a high priority with some MSPs actively pursuing constituents' issues which relate to Council or UK Parliament matters.