

Commission on Parliamentary Reform

Sleat, Isle of Skye public meeting

Thursday 9 March 2017

Following introductions and welcome from Professor Boyd Robertson, **we asked: How well is the Parliament working?**

You said: Here is how we have engaged (see the Activity feedback summary at the end of this note).

You also made the following comments:

- The wide availability of online methods to view the workings of the Parliament has brought it much closer. However, the cost and time needed to visit the Parliament meant as community volunteers you had to engage with the Parliament through other ways such as through MSPs and MP. Whilst it is useful to have access through constituency meetings, the ability to have access through social media to communicate through the website brings the Parliament closer;
- Some have had a positive experience of being able to meet (successfully) with MSPs such as in relation to young people's issues particularly through the Cross Party Group (CPG) on children and young people. At this CPG it had been possible to propose a topic for discussion;
- One person questioned whether the money spent on the Parliament could be better spent elsewhere;
- Concern was expressed that MSPs had not had contact with the local community council which represented the grass roots of the community. The role of regional MSPs connecting to local issues was highlighted as a concern as regional MSPs appeared to 'float' around the region;
- As grass roots organisations it was felt that it would be useful if MSPs could come and speak to community councils about their views on issues affecting communities and to discuss possible solutions;
- The Parliament feeling remote was considered to be a geographical and cultural issue with Parliament operating at the level above communities;
- Good governance is a cross party issue and no one party has the only way to deliver it. Parliament was the place to raise issues and there had been good experience of meeting with MSPs but less contact with Committees. There are barriers to engaging with Committees: legislation is rushed through Parliament meaning that there was an absence of scrutiny (in one instance leading to an error having to be corrected much later in the process). Once a proposal comes from the Scottish Government, you can put in a submission to the Parliament but then you didn't get any feedback. It was highlighted that subtle things in a Bill can have big consequences for local communities;

- It was suggested that newly elected MSPs should get training about what it means to be an MSP;
- It was suggested that Community Councils can provide a good link between the day to day issues that affect people and national interests. National interests were felt to be so big that they are not able to link effectively to community groups, which is a barrier to effective engagement;
- At the moment it felt like Community Councils are left to get on with their own business and are not well resourced - both of which can put off people seeking to sit on Community Councils. This can then result in poorer representation on Community Councils or Community Councils closing down;
- Much more post legislative scrutiny needs to be undertaken to establish if the Bill has done what it set out to achieve – the 2005 Gaelic Language Act was given as an example of legislation that would benefit from post legislative scrutiny;
- The Scottish Parliament was not designed to be adversarial but it is too yah-boo and has become more like Westminster. Candidates go for each other at election but once the Parliament is running they should become more collegiate;
- A second revising chamber (as suggested by some ex MSPs) might be beneficial although it was recognised that there might then need to be fewer MSPs. In the early years of the Parliament, Committees seemed to provide better scrutiny;
- Revising chamber could increase status of community councils with their office bearers forming a revising chamber convened around the country;
- There is an overarching issue about democracy and participation and, as the Parliament matures, it felt like the civil servants pull power towards Edinburgh (repeating what is seen at Westminster). It might be more efficient but it means people are more divorced from Parliament – that needs to be reviewed and Parliament made more local.
- The Scottish Parliament sometimes makes laws that are lofty ideals but cannot be enforced e.g. the sectarianism in football Bill. There is a lack of listening in Parliament about what people are feeling or thinking. It was questioned whether MSPs are independent enough and whether there are enough mavericks?
- Speed of contact with MSPs or Committees sometimes defeats the whole process as by the time you submit your views they have already decided;
- An example of a Committee visit was given where questions were put to the Convener to ask of the Minister. The Minister declined to respond and the information was then sought by the clerk and the response then passed back which showed that sometimes action can result from engagement;
- It was questioned whether there was a role for a citizen's assembly?
- Clerks might be a barrier as they sometimes filter the questions asked by the public which can be a barrier to accountability;
- Better understanding of wider Scotland was needed rather than focussing on Edinburgh and not seeing beyond that. The Parliament has responsibility to everyone in Scotland and not just those who live near it.

Sleat public meeting- engagement activity

Activity Feedback Form - What is your experience of the Scottish Parliament?

Total number of participants: 18

I have watched a Scottish Parliament debate		
On TV	Online	Live at the Parliament
8	4	6

I have read about what the Scottish Parliament has done		
Newspapers	Online	Social Media
11	11	5

I have contacted an MSP			
By email	Written a letter	By Phone	Through social media
7	5	3	1

I have met an MSP				
At the Parliament	At a local surgery	At an event	At school	Other
7	9	6	0	3

I have looked at the Scottish Parliament website		
once	1-5 times	More than 5 times
2	6	3

I have visited the Scottish Parliament to					
Watch business	Take a tour	Visit an exhibition	Attend an event	Have a look around	On a school visit
7	1	2	7	6	0

I have spoken about the Scottish Parliament on social media			
Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Other
1	1	0	0

I have given my views to a committee		
At a meeting at the Scottish Parliament	At an event in my community	By letter, email or on social media
4	1	6