Dear Andrew,

Finance Committee: Review of the budget process

In view of your letter of 1st April 2009 regarding the Committee’s review of the budget process and in particular the resources available to support parliamentary scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s budget, I thought you would be interested to know that the SPCB has recently been reviewing the support available to committees and individual members who are engaged in scrutiny of budgets, past expenditure and the costing of policies. I hope this response is useful to the Committee ahead of its further considerations.

At its meeting on 10 June, the Corporate Body discussed SPCB (2009) Paper 48 - Enhancing Parliamentary Financial Scrutiny proposing an increase in the resource available to committees and individual members through SPICe.

Following careful consideration, the Corporate Body indicated that it wished to put in place a dedicated resource independent of government and located within the Parliamentary Service under the SPCB’s general direction. This would supplement the support already available to committees and provide extensive, specialist support on the full range of work related to scrutiny of budgets and expenditure. It was the SPCB’s opinion that this would require a dedicated resource, able to liaise with civil servants, local authorities and with experts in other organisations to obtain and analyse relevant information.

The Corporate Body considered that to provide the required level of support significant resources would be required. However, it also recognised the current budgetary position and agreed that officials should bring forward proposals for consideration in the 2010/11 budget round. Officials will, of course, take full account of the views of your committee in developing the proposals.
In the short term, the SPCB endorsed the proposals in the paper to increase resources in SPIce by way of secondment for a limited period. Discussions are in progress to agree the best source of short term funding which may involve, with the agreement of the Conveners’ Group, a partial transfer of funding from the existing commissioned/primary research budget for committees.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

P E GRICE
Clerk/Chief Executive