Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

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Dear Bruce

Accuracy of contributions in parliamentary proceedings – guidance

I refer to your letter of 3 November 2010 in which you expressed some concerns about the content of the guidance which accompanies the Committee’s report Accuracy of contributions in parliamentary proceedings – Guidance and Official Report correction mechanism. You suggested some revisions to the guidance to differentiate how to take action relating to ministerial contributions.

The Committee considered the matter at its meeting on 23 November 2010 and agreed to revise the guidance to include all of your suggested revisions and to make two further revisions—

- to include the following text at the start of the guidance: “This guidance applies to all members, including those who are ministers.”; and
- to make the reference to the office of the First Minister gender neutral (paragraph 6).

The revised guidance will replace the existing guidance on the Committee’s webpage with a note to reflect that it has been revised. Your letter will also be published on the Committee’s webpage.

A copy of the revised guidance is enclosed for your information.

Yours sincerely

Gil Paterson MSP
Convener
Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee
**DRAFT GUIDANCE ON STEPS TO REQUEST CORRECTIONS TO POSSIBLE INACCURACIES IN PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS**

1. This guidance applies to all members, including those who are ministers, and sets out a number of ways in which members may seek to highlight and request corrections where it is believed that inaccurate or incomplete information has been given in parliamentary proceedings and such information has not been corrected.

2. Members have a personal responsibility to be accurate and truthful.

3. Where a member believes that a member has been inaccurate during parliamentary proceedings (such as in a plenary debate, during Question Times, in proceedings on a statement or in committee proceedings), he or she may consider taking the following steps—
   - **Resolution during the proceedings**
     Where a member believes that there has been an inaccuracy during parliamentary proceedings, that member should seek to intervene during the proceedings to make that point, inviting the member to reflect on the veracity of what has been said.
   - **Resolution in person/through correspondence**
     If it has not been possible to raise the matter at the time, the member may wish to raise the matter in person or in writing with the member in question.
   - **Seek action through other parliamentary processes and/or procedures**
     Other action which the member may wish to pursue could include—
     - written questions/follow-up questions;
     - lodging a motion calling for a debate on the policy matter in question.

4. It is of course open to members to pursue any of the steps outlined at paragraph 3 above in the event they have concerns with any contribution made by ministers. However, ministers are subject not only to parliamentary rules, but also to the requirements of the Scottish Ministerial Code.


6. Where an incident involves a minister, it is therefore open to members to write to the First Minister requesting that their complaint be referred to the independent advisers established under the Scottish Ministerial Code. Ultimately, it is open to members to lodge a motion before Parliament seeking similar action on the part of the First Minister. However, under either scenario, it remains the sole responsibility...
of the First Minister to decide whether to refer a complaint under the Ministerial Code and to be held accountable to Parliament for any decision taken in that regard.

**Publicising where a correction has been made**

7. Where a member has made a correction to an inaccuracy, they should take steps to make the correction widely known, such as—

- ensuring that the correction is made at the earliest possible opportunity in the Official Report (see *Guidance on the correction of inaccuracies of information provided in parliamentary proceedings through the Official Report*);

- writing to the member who raised the matter;

- placing a copy of the correction in the SPICe library;

- copying any correspondence to the Presiding Officer, relevant party spokespersons and business managers.

[Note: It should be noted that the Official Report correction mechanism referred to in paragraph 7 of this guidance is not yet in operation. The other steps set out in this guidance may still be used to correct an inaccuracy.

An announcement will be made in the Business Bulletin when the Official Report correction mechanism has been introduced and this guidance will then be posted on the Parliament’s website.]