

Fifteen bills to be discussed in the new parliamentary session



The First Minister stood up yesterday afternoon at the first Tuesday afternoon business session at Holyrood to announce the fifteen bills that will be discussed over the coming months.

He had come to the Chamber from elsewhere in the city:-“This morning I visited Dr Bell’s Family Centre in Leith – exactly the type of support today’s £18 million investment will help make available to more people.”

As well as the programme of new bills there are some which are still under discussion such [as the proposed reforms](#) of the Freedom of Information Scotland Act.

During the course of the First Minister’s Speech it seems that he was also engaged in social media. Lothians Labour MSP Neil Findlay announced:- “On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Will you provide some advice on the use of electronic devices in the chamber? I understand that during the past hour the First Minister has been multitasking and that he sent—invisibly—no fewer than 31 tweets during his statement. Will you advise on the protocol for using such devices in the chamber?”

The answer to this was made later in the afternoon at five o’clock when the Deputy Presiding Officer Elaine Smith said:- “Earlier today, Neil Findlay MSP raised a point of order regarding the alleged use of a social networking site by the First Minister during the debate on the Scottish Government’s programme.

“The Presiding Officer wrote to all MSPs in March reminding them about the use of electronic media in the chamber. The letter stated that the Presiding Officer did not consider that the use of electronic devices for purposes such as social networking sites was compatible with the requirements on conduct in the chamber. Having investigated this particular matter, I can inform the chamber that the First Minister has confirmed that the relevant tweets were sent on behalf of the First Minister from this account. Details of how the account is managed can be found on the First Minister’s networking site.”

(This is not the case at The City Chambers where Edinburgh councillors are often observed tweeting and facebooking during council meetings.)

Later in the proceedings the MSPs had to be chastised by The Deputy Presiding Officer in this manner:-” I remind members that although very short conversations are acceptable, prolonged conversations, including on the front bench, should be conducted either at the back of the chamber or outside it. I also remind members to turn off their mobile phones and other devices.” This despite a letter from the Presiding Officer to the MSPs just before they reassembled at Holyrood this week to remind them of how to behave in the Chamber, largely by turning up for debates. The Chamber was certainly not full all of yesterday afternoon.

Hugh Henry Labour MSP for Renfrewshire South had a bit of hard time in even putting his points across when he was requested no less than nine times to ‘give way’, which means to allow another MSP to add a short contribution to the item of discussion. He refused on each occasion.

This is the full legislative programme announced yesterday:-

Budget Bill

The annual Budget Bill provides Parliamentary approval for the

Scottish Government's spending plans, allowing the allocation of resources to the Government's strategic objectives and supporting progress towards its Purpose of creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.

Procurement Reform Bill

The Bill will establish a national legislative framework for sustainable public procurement that supports Scotland's economic growth by delivering community benefits, supporting innovation, considering environmental requirements and promoting public procurement processes and systems which are transparent, streamlined, standardised, proportionate, fair and business-friendly.

Bankruptcy Bill

The Bill will modernise bankruptcy law for the 21st century. It will ensure access to fair and just processes of debt relief and debt management for the people of Scotland, which takes account of the rights and interests of those involved. It will ensure Scottish debt solutions are fair to both the indebted individual and creditor, returning as much as possible to creditors.

Better Regulation Bill

Businesses benefit from regulation which is transparent, consistent, accountable, proportionate, and targeted only at cases where action is needed. The Bill will therefore take steps to improve the way regulations are applied in practice across Scotland, providing for example national regulation systems and standards. The Bill will also include specific measures to further reform planning and deliver a simpler and more effective legislative framework for environmental regulation and enforcement.

Land and Buildings Transaction Tax Bill

The Bill will set out how the proposed replacement tax for Stamp Duty Land Tax will operate under a distinctly Scottish based approach and will better embed provision in Scots Law and practices.

Landfill Tax Bill

The Bill will put in place a replacement for Landfill Tax in Scotland, establishing the administration, charges and rules governing a uniquely Scottish Landfill Tax.

Adult Health & Social Care Integration Bill

The Bill will reform planning and provision of adult health and social care services, establishing effective integration between partners in order to deliver improved, nationally agreed outcomes for services. It will establish joint accountability by Health Boards and Councils for delivery of outcomes, integration of budgets, and improved commissioning and planning of services.

Children and Young People Bill

The Bill will improve the outcomes for all children and young people in Scotland, in particular the most vulnerable, by putting in place a coherent statutory framework for planning and delivery of services provided to children and young people. It will also increase transparency, scrutiny and accountability around the public sector's approach to the practical realisation of children's rights, and it will make provision to deliver the commitment to a minimum of 600 hours free early learning and childcare provision.

Post-16 Education Reform Bill

The Bill will provide an underpinning legal basis for some aspects of the Scottish Government's ambitious programme of post-16 learning reform. It will support the development of a system that is better aligned to meet the needs of learners

and employers, and therefore help drive jobs and growth. It will address key issues such as college and university structure and provision, college regionalisation and widening access.

Forth Estuary Transport Authority Bill

The Bill will enable the Scottish Government to adopt the most cost-effective and coordinated approach to the management and maintenance of the Forth Road Bridge and the new Forth Crossing.

Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill

The Bill will allow same sex couples to marry, and will also allow civil partnerships to be registered through a religious ceremony. It will ensure that no religious bodies and celebrants have to take part in same-sex ceremonies, unless they wish to do so. Ministers are also deeply committed to freedom of speech and religion, and the concerns of those who do not favour same sex marriage require to be properly addressed. The Scottish Government will consult stakeholders on any provisions that are required, in either statute or guidance, to protect these important principles and address specific concerns that have been expressed.

Victims and Witnesses Bill

The Bill will improve the support available for victims and witnesses, putting victims' interests at the heart of improvements to the justice system and ensuring that witnesses are able to fulfil their public duty effectively. The Bill will include provision to widen access to special measures (such as the use of CCTV links) to protect vulnerable witnesses and ensure that offenders contribute to the cost of supporting victims.

Tribunals Bill

The Bill will establish a new, simplified statutory framework for tribunals which determine matters falling within devolved competence. It will bring together those existing tribunals which currently operate in a disparate manner and establish a new system for appeals. This will create a more user-focused and coherent tribunal system in Scotland.

Criminal Justice Bill

The Bill will reform and modernise the system for investigation and prosecution of crime in Scotland. It follows from the thorough, expert reviews of Lord Carloway in relation to criminal procedure generally, and Sheriff Principal Bowen in relation to sheriff and jury procedure. It will ensure Scotland is at the forefront of human rights practice in relation to suspects and accused persons, while at the same time promoting the rights of victims by removing outdated rules on sufficiency of evidence.