A message from the Convener of the Advisory Group

We thought the independence referendum in 2014, was a highpoint in Scottish politics, given the unprecedented engagement with the electorate. This was especially true as young people aged 16 and 17 were able to vote for the first time. But the following years have been something of a roller coaster with, first of all, the unprecedented success of the SNP in the 2015 General Election, and then the 2016 Referendum on membership of the EU. The UK now has a new Prime Minister. The impact of Brexit remains to be seen but already we have seen polarising of opinion in Scotland where a majority voted to remain in the EU while in England and Wales a majority voted to leave the EU. This difference of political opinion has already seen calls for a second Referendum on Scottish Independence.

The SCPO has been building on its already established links to engage with the new MPs elected to represent Scotland at Westminster. The “Meet Your MSP” project has been successful in helping local congregations across Scotland to engage with their local MSPs and share their concerns with them and also showcase the work that Scotland’s churches and Christian faith groups are doing in their local communities. This project has been enthusiastically supported by MSPs across the political spectrum and was celebrated at a parliamentary reception in Holyrood earlier this year.

There have been a number of changes in membership of the SCPO Advisory Group and I was honoured to be asked to chair this group. We spent some time this year revisiting our purpose and remit and developing a mechanism for strategic planning to ensure that the issues which are important to the member denominations are where we invest most time and resources.

The annual meeting of church leaders with the First Minister supported by the SCPO helped to highlight important issues such as the impact of Brexit on immigrants and European citizens living in Scotland.

John Mason MSP has been successful in reforming a Cross Party Group on Freedom of Belief and Religion which the SCPO Advisory Group will participate in as a member.

On behalf of the SCPO Advisory Group, I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by Chloe Clemmens as Parliamentary Advisor and Irene Mackinnon as Development Officer in the work they do to support the group. I would like to thank all members of the Advisory Group, many of them new to its work, for their support during this year of transition.

John Wilson
Convener, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office Advisory Group
About Us

The SCPO serves the following purposes:

1. To provide a Christian perspective on Parliamentary matters.
2. To facilitate churches’ engagement with Parliamentarians and Parliamentary processes.
3. To provide information and intelligence on Parliamentary matters to churches and from churches to politicians.

Established in 1999, the SCPO is a project of the Church of Scotland’s Church and Society Council, but it has a clear and defined ecumenical role. A broad range of Christian traditions and denominations support the SCPO and are associated with this work.

2016 in brief

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) continues to serve a broad range of Scottish Churches on parliamentary and political affairs in the Scottish Parliament, as well as at Westminster.

A review of SCPO took place during 2016. As a consequence of the review a new SCPO remit has been put in place. The SCPO brand has been refreshed with the launch of a new logo, website and newsletter. This has been a valuable time of renewal for SCPO and has coincided with substantial changes to membership of the SCPO Advisory Group as long standing members move on and new members are welcomed.

The first meeting of SCPO in the new Parliamentary session was in September (pictured) and MSPs were invited to drop in. Jeremy Balfour MSP (formerly a member of the SCPO Advisory Group), Margaret Mitchell MSP, Murdo Fraser MSP and John Mason MSP were visiting guests. Following the meeting, host Jeremy Balfour MSP lodged a parliamentary motion congratulating the work of SCPO in bringing churches and political representatives together since the office’s inception in 1999.
During 2016 there were elections for the Scottish Parliament and the UK Referendum on membership of the European Union. These external events mean that SCPO has focussed on getting to know new MSPs and reflecting on the implications of these political changes for the work of Scottish Churches.

The SCPO Twitter account and Facebook page have continued to grow during 2016 and have proved to be a good way of raising the profile of the Office:

Twitter: @SCPO_

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/SCPOffice

Scottish Parliament Elections

SCPO produced a resource “Explore – Faith and the Scottish Elections 2016” in advance of the elections to encourage congregations to engage with a wide variety of issues within their local community. There was a good uptake of the resource, which was available to download from the SCPO website.

Hundreds of people attended the Church of Scotland Speak Out: People’s Politics event in April 2016 in the Assembly Rooms on the Mound where people with lived experience of some of hardship in Scotland told their stories and looked for a response from Scotland’s political leaders on what differences could be made. The Moderator of the General Assembly Rt Rev Dr Angus Morrison chaired the event, with former Conservative party leader Annabel Goldie, Patrick Harvie, co-
convener of the Scottish Green Party, former Labour leader Iain Gray, Liberal Democrat leader Willie Rennie, and Deputy First Minister John Swinney. The webcast of the event can be viewed [here](#).

Meet Your MSP Project

The Meet Your MSP project, led by SCPO, has been running since last June following the Scottish Parliament elections. The idea is a simple one: to actively make connections between churches and local politicians in a variety of ways. SCPO has been equipping congregations to contact their local MSPs, and inviting them to get involved in something that their church is doing.

MSPs have been asked along to special services, attended informal coffee mornings, visited homelessness projects and launches of foodbanks, met church goers at environmental lobbies, and met with local church groups and members over tea and coffee.

By January 2017 around 60 Meet Your MSP meetings had taken place over a wide geographical area including Orkney, the Western Isles, the central belt and the Borders. In Orkney, Liam MacArthur MSP went to Peedie URC Kirk to a meeting of the lunch club, signing a pledge to help tackle loneliness and isolation in the community. In the Western Isles, local MSP Alasdair Allan visited drug and alcohol services run by the Church of Scotland’s social care arm Crossreach. And at the opposite end of the country, in the Borders, Oliver Mundell MSP visited Kate’s Kitchen in Annan.

Church leaders from different denominations supported the project and met their local MSPs, including the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Most Rev David Chillingworth, who met...
Deputy First Minister John Swinney; Rev David Pickering, URC Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland, who met local MSPs Johann Lamont, James Kelly, Adam Tomkins and Clare Haughey, and Rt Rev Dr Russell Barr, Moderator of the Church of Scotland meeting Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson MSP.

These are just a few of the many positive encounters that the project has helped to facilitate.

In February 2017, the Scottish Parliament hosted an event to celebrate the project and to encourage MSPs and churches to continue with the work they have started and build on the relationships made. MSP Kate Forbes submitted a motion to the Scottish Parliament praising the project adding that it was only the beginning of a process that will lead to stronger local communities in the future. The Meet Your MSP project is ongoing and SCPO would like as many churches as possible to get involved.

**Referendum on leaving the European Union**

The SCPO worked alongside the Joint Public Issues Team¹ to produce resources ahead of the EU Referendum. “Think, Pray, Vote: EU Referendum Resources for Churches” explored some of the key issues for Christians ahead of the Referendum providing information, reflection and questions for discussion. The resource was available to download from the SCPO and JPIT websites.

SCPO was represented at a Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) meeting in London to discuss the potential outcomes of the EU Referendum and how churches can work together on the issue and share initiatives.

A fringe event was organised at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland entitled, “The Church in Europe” to explore issues that were relevant to churches ahead of the vote.

**Parliamentary Visits, Events and Meetings**

The annual Church Leaders and Representatives meeting with the First Minister (pictured) took place in January 2017. The meeting focussed on social care needs for an aging population and the particular challenges faced by those with dementia and their carers. Nicola Sturgeon praised the significant role that faith communities play in Scotland.

Present at the meeting were: The Right Rev Dr Russell Barr, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; The Most Revd Bishop David Chillingworth, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church; Rev Norman Graham, Convener of the Public Issues and Social Action Group, Baptist Union of Scotland; The Rev May-Kane Logan, Chair of The Congregational Federation in Scotland; Phil Lucas, Scottish Quakers; Alastair Moodie, President of the Scottish Unitarian Association; Rev Dr David Pickering, Moderator of the Synod of Scotland, United Reformed Church; Rev Alexander Ritchie, Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland; The Most Rev Archbishop Tartaglia, Archbishop of Glasgow and Major Steven Turner, Assistant to the Secretary for Scotland, The Salvation Army. Rev Dr David Easton, Chair of the Synod of the Methodist Church in Scotland and Chair of the Shetland Methodist District was unable to attend the meeting at short notice.

¹ The Joint Public Issues Team is made up of Baptists Together, Church of Scotland, The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. Further information is available at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk

The SCPO serves Scotland’s Churches (administered by The Church of Scotland, Scottish Charity No SC011353)
The meeting was supported by Chloe Clemmons, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer; Anthony Horan, Director, Catholic Parliamentary Office; Rev Matthew Ross, General Secretary of Action of Churches Together in Scotland and John Wilson, Convener, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office.

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament Equalities and Human Rights Committee at a roundtable session on the future work of the Committee. A transcript of the session is available [here](#).

The SCPO accompanied the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on his visit to the Scottish Parliament in February 2017. Chloe Clemmons also accompanied Rt Rev Russell Barr to meet with Angela Constance MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities and Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Local Government & Housing along with Scottish Churches Housing Action.

SCPO was a member of the **Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group in Religious Freedom** during 2016. SCPO has also become a member of new CPG on Religious Freedom which was re-established after the Scottish election.

**Liaison, communication and relationships**

The office is always happy to receive requests to speak or lead workshops from churches or other groups who would like to find out more about the work of SCPO or about a specific Parliamentary issue.

SCPO is a member of:

- The Scottish Churches Anti-Human Trafficking Group
• A monthly meeting of UK Churches Westminster Parliamentary Officers
• The Scottish Churches Committee
• The Association of Scottish Public Affairs and subscribes to their voluntary Code of Conduct

During the year SCPO has also been represented at a number of other events, including the Scottish Episcopal Church’s Church in Society Committee and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

SCPO has participated in Scottish Human Rights Commission meetings and events throughout the year.

As part of the Meet Your MSP Project, Irene MacKinnon attended the mass climate change lobby of the Scottish Parliament as part of the Stop Climate Chaos Campaign. The event was also supported by Christian Aid.

SCPO has been pleased to meet with a number of international visitors this year. A meeting was organised to enable Katharina Schnurbein, in charge of relations with the faith-based communities at the European Commission, to meet with representatives of churches and other faiths. SCPO staff met with a delegation from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and talked with them about the Scottish Referendum and how Scotland has responded to the outcome. A Parliamentary visit (pictured) and discussion was also arranged for a group of ministers, a regional bishop, and a church officer for religious dialogue from Rhine Hesse in Germany.

For further information on any aspect of the work of SCPO please go to www.scpo.scot.

The SCPO serves Scotland’s Churches (administered by The Church of Scotland, Scottish Charity No SC011353)
Staffing

There have been no staff changes during 2016. Chloe Clemmons remains Parliamentary Officer; Irene Mackinnon remains Research and Resource Development Officer and Fiona Brown remains SCPO Administrator.

Advisory Group and Convenership

The SCPO Advisory Group meets roughly every eight weeks when the Parliaments are sitting. It is made up of one representative from each of the Churches associated with the work of the SCPO.

Brian Miller ended his planned term as Convener in the summer of 2016 and stood down as the Baptist Union representative to the Advisory Group. John Wilson took up the position of Interim Convener in September 2016.

During 2016 five new members of the Advisory Group were welcomed.

The Churches associated with the SCPO and their Advisory Group representatives in 2016 have been:

- **Associated Presbyterian Churches***: Rev Ross Macaskill
  Baptist Union of Scotland: Brian Miller (Convener) until June 2016 / Rev Alan Donaldson from June 2016
- Church of Scotland: Rev Peter Nimmo
- Congregational Federation***: Rev May-Kane Logan
- Methodist Church in Scotland: Rev Andrew Letby until April 2016 / Robert MacBean from September 2016
- Religious Society of Friends: Alastair Reid until June 2016 / Phil Lucas from June 2016
- Roman Catholic Church: Anthony Horan from July 2016
- Scottish Episcopal Church: Elspeth Davey until December / Miriam Weiybe from January 2017
- Scottish Unitarian Association: Rob Whiteman until June 2016 / Alastair Moodie from June 2016
- The Salvation Army: Lt Col Jonathan Roberts until June 2016 / Major Steven Turner from June 2016
- United Free Church of Scotland: Ian Buchanan
- United Reformed Church: Rev Mitchell Bunting

Also attending the Advisory Group is Rev Matthew Ross representing Action of Churches Together in Scotland.

At the end of 2016 Elspeth Davey retired from her role as Church Relations Officer at the Scottish Episcopal Church and stood down from the SCPO Advisory Group. SCPO would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement received from Elspeth over many years’ service on the Advisory Group.

* The Associated Presbyterian Churches continue to receive papers, although they have not been actively involved in the work of the SCPO in 2016.
** The Congregational Federation continues to receive papers, but do not usually attend Advisory Group meetings. In January 2017 a representative attended the Church Leaders meeting with the First Minister.

** Finance **

Since the creation of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office in 1999, the Church of Scotland has contributed the core funding support, with the other participating denominations contributing as they are able. The financial support from other Churches makes a valuable and useful contribution to the running of the SCPO. The Scottish Catholic Bishop’s Conference also employs a Parliamentary Officer, who works closely with the SCPO.

The SCPO is administered by the Church of Scotland (Scottish Charity No. SC011353); it does not have its own budget; instead it operates as part of the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland. Full details about financial reporting are presented by the Church of Scotland. The following data is provided for general information and interest only. It should be noted that the position of Research and Information Officer was vacant for part of the 2015.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>2016(£)</th>
<th>2015(£)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church of Scotland</td>
<td>72,943</td>
<td>71,959</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecumenical contributions</td>
<td>8,250</td>
<td>7,650</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81,193</td>
<td>79,609</td>
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<table>
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<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>2016(£)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Salaries, Pension &amp; NI, travel and subsistence</td>
<td>78,338</td>
<td>71,818</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting room hire, refreshments and hospitality</td>
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<td>SCPO Rental</td>
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<td>Revenue Interest Paid</td>
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<td>152</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,374</td>
<td>2,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81,193</td>
<td>79,609</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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