



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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## Division Bell for Holyrood

### **The Division Bell will be used to alert MSPs to Decision Time**

Business starts again at Holyrood this week, and from Tuesday building users will hear a new sound at the Scottish Parliament: A bell which will ring out complex wide to tell MSPs of impending votes and business motions in the Parliament's Debating Chamber.

The Division Bell will be primarily used to alert MSPs to Decision Time – the point, usually at the end of a day's plenary business, when votes are taken on preceding debates and proposed legislation.

The bell will sound at both ten minutes and five minutes before Decision Time when it takes place, usually at 5pm. It will sound for 45 and 15 seconds respectively at each of these intervals.

At this time, business will not be suspended as the bell will not be audible in the Debating Chamber or in Committee rooms. Operation of the division bell will be the responsibility of parliament staff located in the well of the Chamber.

In order to assist the hearing impaired, each sounding of the bell will be accompanied by a message on the Parliament's Information Channel, which will display a message on TV screens throughout the building, drawing attention to the fact that the bell is ringing.

Other times when the bell will be used are as follows:

- **Stage 3 proceedings**

Proceedings will be suspended for five minutes at the first division during Stage 3 proceedings. At the beginning of this period the bell will sound for 45 seconds and then at the end of the period for 15 seconds. There will then be a 30 second slot for voting.

The bell will only sound for the first division during Stage 3 proceedings, or for the first division after resumed proceedings (e.g. Stage 3 is taken over two days or continues over a lunch period).

- **Business Motions**

Business motions setting out the fortnightly cycle of Chamber business are normally taken just before decision time and will fall naturally within the arrangements for regular Decision Time and will not require the bell to be used for any resultant divisions.

However, other business motions, such as timetabling arrangements for Stage 3 proceedings, can be taken at different times of the day. The bell will sound for a period of

45 seconds at the beginning and 15 seconds at the end of suspension period of 5 minutes for any divisions on such motions.

These arrangements will also apply to the regular weekly business motion where proceedings finish early and a business motion falls to be taken before any decision on bringing forward Decision Time can be taken.

- **Motions without Notice**

The majority of motions without notice concern bringing forward Decision Time or extending Members' Business. The former are dealt with above and the latter have to date, never been contested. In the very unlikely event that they were, the bell will not be used due to the fact that only those present have a direct interest in the outcome.

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## **SPCB Sets Out Defence of McAlpine Case at Preliminary Hearing Today**

On December 22 2004 the SPCB announced that legal proceedings had been initiated against the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) by two Sir Robert McAlpine companies. The actions sought to challenge the process by which the Construction Manager contract for the Holyrood Project was awarded.

This procurement process was managed by the Scottish Office, who awarded the contract to Bovis Lend Lease (Scotland) Ltd in January 1999. This decision preceded the establishment of both the Parliament and the SPCB in May 1999, and the transfer of all Holyrood contracts to the SPCB in June 1999.

The SPCB's Senior Counsel, Gerry Moynihan QC, today commenced the SPCB's defence of these actions at a hearing in Edinburgh's Court of Session. At this hearing, one of the two actions was dropped by McAlpines, leaving the case brought by Sir Robert McAlpine Construction Management Limited against the SPCB.

The preliminary hearing today in the Court of Session was about case management. The next stage in the process will be for McAlpines to further develop and substantiate the claims made in their summons. The court has given McAlpines a period of four weeks to do this. The SPCB will then be in a position to respond to these more detailed claims, and a further hearing has been fixed for March 23 2005.

Out of respect for the court, the SPCB will not comment further at this time on the details of its defence.

### **Background**

Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd are claiming for the sum of £4.31m as lost profits, a substantial sum that would have to be found from the public purse if this action is pursued and is successful.

Legal proceedings were initiated by the Sir Robert McAlpine companies in December 2004. These actions came before Lord Clarke in the commercial court at the Court of Session in Edinburgh today as a preliminary hearing.

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