



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 1 June 2017

Session 5



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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
11th Meeting 2017, Session 5

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Wands

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 1 June 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and welcome to the 11th meeting in 2017 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I remind everyone to switch all electronic devices to silent, as they might interfere with broadcasting.

We have received an apology from Tom Arthur MSP.

Under agenda item 1, I seek the committee's agreement to consider our work programme in private at the next meeting. Do members agree to do so?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Cross-party Group

10:01

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, we will take evidence on the proposed cross-party group on Govanhill. I welcome Anas Sarwar and invite him to make an opening statement.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): First, convener, I apologise for being 30 seconds late. ScotRail was on time, so I missed my train.

As Patrick Harvie will know, the idea for this cross-party group very much came from people in the local community in Govanhill. Members of the Scottish Parliament were invited to a cross-party event involving the community and organisations there. At that event, people expressed their frustrations and talked about the constant elections that are happening and the fact that different parties are in power in different places. They said that they wanted politicians who represent the city of Glasgow, as well as other MSPs, to recognise the national and local impact of what is happening in Govanhill, and to work together in a way that can take the heat out of what is happening in the Govanhill vicinity and bring the issues to Parliament in a way that is more appropriate. That is why I think that it is in the interests of the Govanhill community and, more widely, of Scotland and the Parliament to have a cross-party group that can look at the specific issues in Govanhill.

The approach to issues affecting Govanhill must be different from the approach that is taken by national strategies, because of the specific challenges that we face in Govanhill, whether they concern housing, immigration, social integration, poverty and health inequalities, health and education services or cleansing and environmental issues. I am sure that some members will have seen the programme that was broadcast a couple of weeks ago about human trafficking, which is also a huge issue in Govanhill.

The cross-party group is designed to be a forum that can bring together all political parties in our Parliament, as well as individuals or organisations from Govanhill, to speak openly and honestly in a less confrontational environment than might be the case locally, so that we can discuss how we can make progress on those issues, find common ground and come up with policies that suit the Govanhill area and serve as an example to other places.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am interested in what you say about the possibility that having meetings in the Parliament rather than in Govanhill could create a less confrontational environment for the discussions. However, given

that people are already actively involved in addressing some of the issues around things such as environment, cleansing and so on, would it not be a duplication of effort to bring them to Parliament to discuss the same issues?

Anas Sarwar: Do you mean agencies or elected members?

Emma Harper: Agencies.

Anas Sarwar: As anyone who has ever been to a public meeting in Govanhill will know, such meetings very quickly descend into battles between agencies or organisations, or indeed individuals. The suggestion that we have a cross-party group that could bring together the agencies in a way that is overseen by parliamentarians who are the elected voices of people in Govanhill and beyond was made directly by community organisations and individual residents in Govanhill, because they wanted to overcome some of those challenges.

On your point about duplication, there has been communication with, for example, the education and social work departments and the street cleansing and development and regeneration services in Glasgow. Sometimes, there is confrontation between agencies in a local authority. We are trying to create a forum for discussion. In the past couple of days, we have communicated with Glasgow City Council and different forums. The Govanhill action group is co-chaired by the local Scottish National Party councillor and the local Labour councillor. The intention is to invite them to join the cross-party group. They have not ruled out doing so, but they want to meet cross-party group members to discuss their work and to see whether common ground can be found.

Emma Harper: Would the cross-party group meet here initially, to try to build relationships, and then meet locally?

Anas Sarwar: It would probably have to be a combination, with the group meeting here and locally. That would be for the cross-party group members—elected and non-elected—to decide. We would like to have meetings here in Parliament but, on some occasions, we would be required to carry out field visits or to meet agencies in Govanhill or other parts of Glasgow. As a CPG, we would be open to doing that.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Section 6.3.11 of the “Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament” asks us to consider two things when we are looking at the establishment of a CPG: public interest and whether the proposed CPG would overlap with an existing CPG. Will you describe the public interest in having a CPG with a focus on Govanhill?

Anas Sarwar: On the overlap, the CPG on Govanhill would consider work similar to that of other CPGs, such as work on health inequalities, housing and human trafficking. It would be important to see what opportunities there are to work with those other CPGs. What would make the CPG on Govanhill distinct is that we would bring together the myriad of individual issues and challenges in the area.

The public interest element is clear. Govanhill has become a national story for all the wrong reasons, but good things are happening there, too. What happens in Govanhill might have an impact on wider policy making in Scotland. However, the day-to-day impact of national policy on people’s lives in Govanhill is even more severe. There is genuine public interest in the people of Govanhill knowing that their parliamentarians are working together with the local agencies to try to address those issues.

What makes Govanhill different from other places? I am not sure that national strategies on issues such as housing, immigration, street cleansing, the environment or regeneration will reflect the priorities in Govanhill. We might need distinct policy making for the area that is different from what would be classed as national strategies. That would definitely be in the public interest. As I say, interest has been expressed to us by the Govanhill public.

Daniel Johnson: A clear purpose of a CPG is to bring together policy makers with outside individuals and organisations. It is great to see that you have the local police inspector and the community council as external members. Are you seeking to engage and to bring on board other local organisations?

Anas Sarwar: Yes, absolutely. After our first meeting, where we constituted the group, we invited a number of organisations to join. A number of them expressed an interest in doing so. My intention would be to take to the group’s next meeting all the communications that have come from those organisations, so that members can approve their membership and invite them to future meetings.

Daniel Johnson: Do you see the proposed CPG as a model for bringing together people to focus on particular issues in particular areas? Could it benefit other places?

Anas Sarwar: I cannot comment on whether it would be a model for other areas. Genuinely, it is about Govanhill. It is my intention that the group be about Govanhill. Anyone who has ever visited Govanhill, spoken to Govanhill residents, read some of the horrific things that happen in Govanhill or watched any of the television pieces on Govanhill will understand how serious the

issues are for local people and the genuine day-to-day impact on people's lives. It is only right that that is reflected in priorities for the Parliament and its parliamentarians. Therefore, it is incredibly important for us have the group.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): You put forward a strong case for the establishment of a cross-party group on Govanhill, and I am sympathetic towards that. What priorities and agenda would you set initially? Obviously, you have a lot of issues to take on board, so you would need to prioritise and decide what can be achieved in the short or long term. How would you go about trying to achieve those things, because obviously they have not been achieved in the past?

Anas Sarwar: That is a very good question. The four themes that the proposed CPG has identified are housing; cleansing and environmental services; inequalities and social integration; and crime and antisocial behaviour. However, the most important issue is housing, because it tracks on to the other issues. We have a huge problem of overcrowding in Govanhill. In some circumstances, families who were trafficked from other parts of Europe, particularly eastern Europe, with the promise of a job and a home are living in overcrowded accommodation. Eight to 12 people can live in a flat where only one person is working, with an income of, say, £200 a week. Of that, £50 will go to their gangmaster and £100 will be for their accommodation, which leaves only £50 to sustain a family of up to 12 people.

So many of the issues around crime and antisocial behaviour, human trafficking, cleansing and regeneration stem from housing issues. The council and the Scottish Government have previously considered the use of compulsory purchase orders. That is about using the powers that we have at local authority or Scottish Government level to make a transformational change with regard to housing and overcrowding. We are really keen to have that policy discussion.

Alexander Stewart: From developing all that, you will get short-term success stories on specific issues. However, there will still be a massive issue in the long term that will have to involve not just parliamentarians but the agencies and organisations that will have to take ownership of the issue to make things work.

Anas Sarwar: Absolutely. For example, without the support of the local police, the local agencies associated with the council and the housing association, and without buy-in from all political parties and local community organisations, it will always be a challenge to get the right results for Govanhill. As I said, there are good things happening in Govanhill, but we are caught up with all the bad things and what appears, at least to the

public, to be the sparring between agencies and political parties. It will be an important signal to have a forum in which we take the party politics out of the equation and genuinely try to work together and bring together agencies to address the issues in Govanhill.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I was going to ask you about the unique circumstances of Govanhill, but colleagues have already asked about those. I am very much taken by the idea that the proposal for the CPG essentially comes from a grass-roots movement up. You have identified many of the unique problems in Govanhill, but what do you see as the outcome for the proposed CPG? You said that you believe that the national strategies are not working—do you see the group as a catalyst to put further pressure on the Government?

Anas Sarwar: It is about a combination. It would be wrong for me to suggest that a cross-party group on Govanhill will be the silver bullet that will solve all the problems in the area. Frankly, if I said that I would not be telling the truth, because that is simply not the case. The situation in Govanhill is very complicated; it has been years in the making and it will take years to resolve. The first part of the combination that is required to resolve it involves the housing issue. It is about how we tackle the gangmasters and the slum landlords through having adequate housing legislation that gives the teeth to either the housing association or the local authority to take action against rogue landlords and transform the heart of Govanhill. That is a long-term issue.

Secondly, social integration is a huge challenge. The local school states that more than 40 languages are spoken within it. That situation has an impact on children's education and on local services, such as general practitioner services and health services more widely. How do we address social integration to ensure that we get communities working together? Govanhill has always been an attractive place for people to move to, whenever there have been high levels of migration. Traditionally, it was the place that the Irish community went to when they first came to Glasgow and where the Jewish community and the south Asian community first went to when they to Glasgow. It was always seen as a great place, where people integrated and Govanhill went on.

This time, there are specific challenges around mass migration from Europe, but that is less to do with the individuals than with the people who are exploiting them. The important issue is how we work with the police to tackle exploitation, identify the gangmasters and ensure that the legislation that we put in place is effective on the ground.

10:15

As an aside, one of the things that I find most abhorrent about what is happening in Govanhill and which I would find completely unacceptable at any time, but particularly in the 21st century, is women having to think twice about walking down a street, because of the possibility of verbal abuse or threat of physical attack. There are streets in Govanhill that women will not walk down unless they are accompanied by someone; that is happening right now in Glasgow and in Scotland, and we need to challenge and address such issues head on.

Further to that, we also have to address the levels of crime and the exploitation of people through drug use, prostitution or, indeed, the sham marriages that were exposed in the BBC programme. All such issues have to be addressed, and I think that the establishment of the group is an important symbol of the seriousness with which the Parliament takes the issues in Govanhill; of the maturity that, I hope, we have in our politics through the bringing together of politicians from different parties in recognition of Govanhill as a specific case that should dodge any party-political infighting; and of the need to bring agencies together in a strategic approach to this issue.

That is the intention behind the group. I repeat that I do not think that it is a silver bullet, but I hope that it represents progress.

John Scott: I wish you every success.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): As members will be aware, I am a member of the proposed CPG. I just wanted to ensure that this session did not go by without some greater recognition of the fact that we are talking about not just an area with problems but an area with strengths.

Anas Sarwar: Absolutely.

Patrick Harvie: There is a lot of creativity and vibrancy in the local community, and some people are doing fantastic work either as a response to the particular challenges or just because they are exploring and expressing the strengths of a diverse community.

All the different levels of government, including the Scottish Government, have made some attempt to respond proactively to the particular circumstances in Govanhill. However, although each level can engage with the community, people can end up feeling that stuff is being done to them if that engagement happens in, if you like, separate boxes. Do you agree that there is no forum or space for people to engage across government at local, Scottish and United Kingdom level as well as with other agencies and that that is what the CPG aims to provide?

Anas Sarwar: Absolutely. At the meeting with the community council that I attended with Mr Harvie, people were expressing the same view and highlighting a situation in which the issue goes from one agency to another. It gets kicked around like a football, and the question is where it lands. It is therefore important that we have the opportunity to bring together all the agencies, perhaps outwith the heat of what is happening in Govanhill.

I want to emphasise Patrick Harvie's point that, although there are bad stories in Govanhill, there are also some really good stories. I would love it if the CPG were able not only to help tailor policies from here and other places to overcome the challenges in the area but to use the example of what people in Govanhill have got right as a gold standard of social integration and of how to resolve the challenge of providing local public services in an area where lots of different identities and cultures have been brought together. We can learn lessons from what has been done in Govanhill and replicate them in other areas; after all, what has happened in Govanhill could well happen in another part of Scotland, the UK or indeed Europe. If we can tell a positive story about Govanhill as well as find answers to the challenges in the area, we might be able to get an approach that can be replicated in other parts of the UK and Europe.

Patrick Harvie: Thank you.

The Convener: We have touched briefly on this, but can you give us an idea of how the group intends to engage and work with other CPGs such as the group on health inequalities that, as you have said, have a similar remit? After all, we now have a lot of CPGs and every member's time is very constrained when it comes to such activities.

Anas Sarwar: The obvious overlaps are with the CPGs on housing, health inequalities and human trafficking. I intend at the earliest opportunity to write to all three groups, asking whether any co-working can be done; for example, if they were bringing together key stakeholders or policy makers, we could see whether that could happen as part of a joint meeting or joint session. We can also find out whether there are lessons that they have learned or any examples of good practice that we can learn from.

That would particularly be the case on the human trafficking side, because I think that that is a weakness in the CPG on Govanhill. It would be quite natural for us to focus on day-to-day issues such as cleansing, housing and local policing, but the wider issues around human trafficking require a much broader approach and the CPG on that would be a particular help.

Emma Harper: The clerks will keep me right, but I think that there are about 95 cross-party

groups right now, and it is a real challenge to get to the meetings. How often do you propose to meet?

Anas Sarwar: We will soon have more CPGs than MSPs, which will be an interesting challenge. Our intention is to have one meeting this side of the summer recess to look in particular at housing issues and another meeting on the other side of the recess that will focus more on wider environmental and cleansing issues, which are hot topics. I intend the group to meet as often as is practicably possible, which I hope will entail at least three or four meetings in the Parliament each calendar year and, I hope, some sessions in Govanhill.

The Convener: I thank Anas Sarwar for his attendance. We will consider the application for the CPG under our next agenda item, and you will be informed of the decision as quickly as possible.

Anas Sarwar: Thank you so much for your time, convener.

The Convener: We move to agenda item 3, and I invite comments from members on the proposed CPG.

Patrick Harvie: I am happy to support its establishment, but then I would be, because I am a member of the group.

Alexander Stewart: I think that what the group is trying to achieve is laudable, but there is no question but that it faces some challenges. It might be useful if it is able to take the heat out of the issues surrounding Govanhill, and it might well be successful if it focuses on specific issues as agenda items. The situation is complicated and quite volatile for residents and members of Parliament, but the proposal is without question something that should be tried, because it gives an opportunity to take some heat out of the problem.

Emma Harper: My concern is about duplicating work that is already going on and pulling people out of Govanhill to bring them to Edinburgh. However, Anas Sarwar made a valid point about taking the heat out of things; sometimes getting out of a situation allows you to have a clearer head and more of a focus. I agree that it is a laudable proposal on an issue that obviously has to be addressed.

John Scott: I essentially support everything that has been said. This is a naturally welcoming community, but the problems are manifest, and any effort by a cross-party group to address some of them is welcome and must be a good thing. It has been recognised, sensibly, that the group will not necessarily be a silver bullet, but if it is a catalyst for improvement, that has to be a good thing.

The Convener: Do members agree, then, to accord recognition to the cross-party group on Govanhill?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We now move into private session.

10:23

Meeting continued in private until 10:31.

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