



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 24 June 2014

Session 4

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JUSTICE COMMITTEE
20th Meeting 2014, Session 4

CONVENER

*Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
*Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)
*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
*Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)
*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)
*John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
*Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Irene Fleming

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Justice Committee

Tuesday 24 June 2014

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Christine Grahame): Good morning and welcome to the Justice Committee's 20th meeting in 2014. I ask everyone to switch off mobile phones and other electronic devices as they interfere with the broadcasting system. No apologies have been received.

Under item 1, I invite members to agree to consider item 4, which relates to our work programme, in private. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Subordinate Legislation

Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Prescribed Police Stations) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 (SSI 2014/147)

10:00

The Convener: Item 1 is consideration of three negative instruments. The purpose of the first set of regulations is to add certain police stations or to remove them from the list of prescribed stations for sex offenders who are subject to the notification requirements in part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee did not raise any concerns about the regulations.

Margaret Mitchell wants to say something about the regulations.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I have a bit of a concern. I understand that this is an issue that relates to the move from eight forces to the single police force. However, it seems to me that the regulations could have the effect of making it much more difficult for sex offenders to comply with notification requirements, such as some of the requirements that relate to the sex offender register. For example, the closure of Girvan police station could require offenders to make a 22-mile journey to report to Ayr police station. It seems to me that anything that we do to make it more difficult for offenders to comply with such requirements is a matter of some concern.

The Convener: I have to say that the 22-mile journey from Girvan to Ayr is not too bad, given that there is a good bus connection.

Nobody else wishes to make any comments, so are members content to make no recommendation in relation to the regulations?

Margaret Mitchell: I just want my concern to be noted.

The Convener: It is on the record.

I take it that the committee agrees to make no recommendation.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Scotland) Amendment (No 3) Order 2014 (SSI 2014/149)

The Convener: The second instrument rectifies, with retrospective effect, errors contained in the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Order 2014, which the committee considered on 20 May. The Delegated

Powers and Law Reform Committee did not raise any concerns with us on the order.

Members have no comments, so are we content to make no recommendation in relation to the order?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Adults with Incapacity (Supervision of Welfare Guardians etc by Local Authorities) (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2014 (SSI 2014/157)

The Convener: The final instrument corrects an erroneous cross-reference in the Adults with Incapacity (Supervision of Welfare Guardians etc by Local Authorities) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2014. Again, there were no comments from the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee. Do members have any comments to make?

Margaret Mitchell: It is just another drafting error that has been brought to our attention.

The Convener: Yes. I think we would all agree with that. We regularly get drafting errors—minor and otherwise. It is important to put that on the record, because we have to come back to these things, which takes up time.

Are members content to make no recommendation in relation to the regulations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Petitions

Emergency and Non-emergency Services Call Centres (PE1510)

Inverness Fire Service Control Room (PE1511)

10:03

The Convener: Item 3 is consideration of two petitions. PE1510, by Jody Curtis, on behalf of emergency service and non-emergency service call centres, calls on the Scottish Parliament to undertake a committee inquiry into the closure of police, fire and non-emergency service centres north of Dundee. PE1511, by Laura Ross, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the decision by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to close the Inverness fire control room.

The Public Petitions Committee referred the petitions to this committee, with a request that we raise the issues highlighted in the petitions at our evidence session with the chief inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the inspector of constabulary on 19 August. Are members content to consider the terms of the petitions during that evidence session? As a courtesy, we could also inform the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing that we are looking at PE1510. Any decision to do that does not mean that the petition will then be closed; it is just that it might be better to wait until then. I invite comments.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): These are worthwhile petitions. There is still a lot of concern, certainly in my communities in North East Scotland, about the stripping away of these assets, which remains controversial. In advance of our meeting, could we write to emergency planning authorities to ask for their views on the closures and the capacity of their areas to respond to major incidents, just to inform our discussions?

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I think that we have to be careful in our use of language. I am not saying that Alison McInnes was being intemperate, but when we talk about things such as public safety, we must remember the importance of the public having confidence in the services. It would be very easy for me to say, "That's a great idea—let's support it," and to put out a press release about it without acknowledging that a lot of work is going on behind the scenes.

Members of the public often talk about the issue of local knowledge erroneously, albeit in good faith. We need to be very temperate when we discuss the issue. Public safety is not being

compromised, because it could not be compromised.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): It might be worth asking the Scottish Police Federation and the Fire Brigades Union for their views. I know that the FBU had concerns about the closures. It would be helpful to get an idea of whether the people who represent the emergency workers are aware of or concerned about any difficulties.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): We should ensure that PE1510 is drawn to the attention of the inspectorates before they give evidence on 19 August, so that they are fully aware of the concerns.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Has the Public Petitions Committee considered the issue? We should check with it to see whether it has asked for anything.

The Convener: The Public Petitions Committee did not take evidence from the petitioners.

Rather than selecting a group of people to write to, we might put information on our website about the fact that, on 19 August, we will take evidence from the inspectorates and to say anyone can submit issues to us in advance, either collectively or individually. We do not want to leave out people who want to comment.

If we put out a call for evidence for the evidence-taking session, we will give people the whole of July and the beginning of August to respond. That should catch everyone. Of course, this discussion is also on the record.

Alison McInnes: I would particularly like to hear from emergency planning authorities. They might not necessarily pick up the fact that there is a call for evidence.

The Convener: I am advised that there are distribution lists, which will be used as well. I do not want to write to just one group. If we use the normal distribution lists and issue a general call for evidence, anyone who wants to give us information in advance of that session can do so. That does not close anything down; it just seems an appropriate way to deal with it.

I see that Christian Allard wants to ask a question. I thought that we had agreed what to do, but perhaps not.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): No, we are agreed. I just want to know whether the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing has done any work on the issue that we should be aware of before the evidence-taking session.

The Convener: Not as far as I know.

I am informed that petitioners spoke to both petitions before the Public Petitions Committee,

but that the committee did not conduct an inquiry, as such. We will get the information before us.

Sandra White: We have to have all the paperwork.

The Convener: Yes, we will get it all.

Do members agree to our taking the suggested action?

Members *indicated agreement.*

10:08

Meeting continued in private until 10:19.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78457-736-0

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78457-751-3