COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION
(SCOTLAND BRANCH)

8th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 24 June 2009

DRAFT MINUTES

The Annual General Meeting (“AGM”) opened in Committee Room 2 at 1.00 pm and was chaired by Mr Alex Fergusson MSP, President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Scotland Branch (“The President”).

Attendance

The following Members of the Branch were in attendance: Ted Brocklebank MSP; Bill Butler MSP; Linda Fabiani MSP; Patricia Ferguson MSP; Murdo Fraser MSP; Karen Gillon MSP; Hugh Henry MSP; Tom McCabe MSP; Des McNulty MSP; Tricia Marwick MSP; Stewart Maxwell MSP; Margaret Mitchell MSP; Hugh O'Donnell MSP; Peter Peacock MSP; Richard Simpson MSP; David Stewart MSP; Jamie Stone MSP; Sandra White MSP; David Whitton MSP.

The Branch President welcomed the Members and noted that the quorum for the AGM of one twelfth of the membership of the CPA Scotland Branch (“the Branch”) had been met.

The Branch President opened the meeting and welcomed Members to the 9th Annual General Meeting of the CPA Scotland Branch.

Agenda Item 1 - Apologies

Brian Adam MSP; Richard Baker MSP; Gavin Brown MSP; Robert Brown MSP; Bruce Crawford MSP; Fergus Ewing MSP; George Foulkes MSP; Margo McDonald MSP; Ian McKee MSP; Mike Pringle MSP; Karen Whitefield MSP.
Agenda Item 2 - Minutes from the 2008 AGM

The Minutes of the Branch’s 7th AGM, which took place on 17 June 2008, were proposed by Jamie Stone MSP and seconded by Karen Gillon MSP.

The Minutes were agreed to.

Agenda Item 3 – The Report and Accounts for 2007/08

The Reports and Accounts for 2007/08 were proposed by Ted Brocklebank MSP and seconded by Margaret Mitchell MSP.

Ted Brocklebank MSP spoke about his positive experiences as a Member of the CPA. He stated that being involved in the CPA increases Members knowledge of different legislatures and benefited Members by allowing them to learn about how democracy works in other places. He also mentioned that by supporting inward visit programmes, Members could increase their knowledge about policy issues elsewhere and have the opportunity to discover how these issues are tackled. Mr Brocklebank also spoke about the hundreds of Commonwealth visits that Scotland Branch had hosted over the years as well as high level conferences and seminars. Members were encouraged to volunteer to meet fellow Commonwealth parliamentarians and take the opportunity to learn from them through the visit programmes which CPA Scotland Branch facilitated. These opportunities were invaluable and provide excellent value for money.

Mr Brocklebank MSP also informed Members that a visit programme to Australia and New Zealand was planned for October and that the Branch would accept an invitation to attend the CPA Annual Plenary Conference in Tanzania later in the year.

Jamie Stone MSP thanked CPA Members for providing him with the opportunity to visit Canada. He reported that the visit was hard work but very informative. Mr Stone paid tribute to the work of Roseanna Cunningham MSP who had served the Branch Executive Committee well during her time in office and also thanked the Scotland Branch Secretary, Margaret Neal and the External Liaison Unit for their hard work in ensuring the visit to Canada was a success. Mr Stone also reported that he felt Scotland Branch had made a significant contribution to supporting the Year of Homecoming both at home and overseas ensuring that the key messages were promoted to the wider Commonwealth.

Karen Gillon MSP reported that she had recently returned from Guernsey where she had attended the British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Annual Conference. She reported that the BIMR conference in Guernsey had been very informative. The conference theme was about the Global Financial Crisis. The opportunity to sit in a small group with impartial international experts to discuss, learn and share information about the effects that this phenomenon had in different regions was a unique opportunity for parliamentarians.
Ms Gillon also spoke about the future of the Commonwealth and in particular, the CPA. She reported that there was still the perception that instances of regional voting were still occurring during the International Executive Committee Meetings and issues around transparency and accounting were causing tensions within the CPA. Ms Gillon mentioned that CPA Wales Branch had prepared a paper on CPA Governance which had instigated a lively debate about the approach to resolving CPA governance issues. Members of the Scottish delegation felt quite strongly that whilst there seemed to be a good case for closer examination of the CPA and its structures, CPA Scotland Branch had concerns that correct procedures should be followed.

Ms Gillon also informed Members that she had visited Malawi under the auspices of the CPA for 4 days following the 2009 elections in June 2009. Ms Gillon updated Members about the new political landscape. She advised that new Members are keen to learn from Scotland on how to be an effective government bencher but also effective in opposition when no longer a member of the government party. Ms Gillon also reported that there would be opportunities to develop this relationship. Malawian MPs were not asking for financial assistance but assistance in terms of education and knowledge transfer which our MSPs were perfectly positioned to deliver.

Sandra White MSP thanked the CPA Branch Executive Committee for their work over the year. She mentioned that opportunities had been provided by Scotland Branch to attend meetings and events in the Scottish Parliament including meeting with young people with links to the Commonwealth. She stated it had been a pleasure to speak to young people about the values that the Commonwealth stands for – fairness, justice and democracy - and encouraged other Members to become involved.

Margaret Mitchell MSP gave an update on the two CPA conferences she had attended; the conference on migration and human trafficking highlighted that these issues are not interstate issues but intra state issues. The migration and human trafficking conference also highlighted the benefits of migration and the need for it to be managed. Through attending conferences Members were able to pick up on issues which mattered to other parliamentarians. For example at the BIMR conference in Guernsey it was highlighted that the Channel Islands have a unique status in that they are not part of the EU, which could bring advantages and also disadvantages depending on particular circumstances. Mrs Mitchell thanked the Branch Secretary for her hard work and support over the year.

Bill Butler MSP wanted to put on record his thanks for being given the privilege of being able to exchange knowledge with other legislatures during his attendance at the CPA Parliamentary Seminar he had attended in Ottawa. Parliamentary ethics and transparency are very different in other places compared to Scotland, he reflected.

Tricia Marwick MSP gave an update on the CPA Conference in Malaysia which she attended along with David Whitten MSP. It was evident that there were tensions at the conference linked to key elections for office bearers which were taking place during the conference. She reported that Scottish delegates received a very positive welcome from the other delegates. Both she and David
Whitton attended all of the sessions in the official conference programme. It was clear that many representatives from other legislatures at the conference were looking towards Scotland to see what could be learned from a parliament with modern processes and procedures.

David Whitton MSP thanked the Branch Executive Committee for the opportunity to participate in the conference in Malaysia. Mr Whitton said that he had taken part in the media session and was interested to learn differences in how members used the Chamber. For example, in Australia, laptops are prohibited in the Chamber while in Wales they are allowed. Mr Whitton also raised concern about emerging regional tensions becoming apparent, particularly around the election of office bearers. He hoped that a means could be found to ensure that the CPA resolved any issues to allow the organisation to grow stronger in the future.

Robin Harper MSP reported that he had attended the International Development Conference for parliamentarians in London and found the conference to be extremely worthwhile. Parliamentary scrutiny of donor funding had been covered and there seemed to be considerable interest in this topic beyond the Commonwealth. For example representatives from Jordan attended which widened the area of interest and sensitised Commonwealth parliamentarians to particular challenges faced outwith the Commonwealth.

The Branch President thanked Members for their contributions.

**Agenda Item 4 - Election of Executive Committee**

Ted Brocketbank MSP, Jamie Stone MSP, Karen Gillon MSP and Sandra White MSP were nominated and elected as members of the CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee for the ensuing year.

Jamie Stone MSP highlighted the importance that Scotland is represented where possible at international conferences to promote Scotland, the Scottish Parliament and its people to a wide international audience and asked Members to relay this to the Business Managers to ensure cross party delegations could participate when opportunities arose.

The Branch President brought the meeting to a close and added his thanks to Margaret Neal for her work as Branch Secretary, which he said was valued by Members, and also his thanks to the External Liaison Unit for supporting Commonwealth visits throughout the year. The Branch President asked the Secretary to record these comments in the minutes.

Margaret Neal
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