



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

DEVOLUTION (FURTHER POWERS) COMMITTEE

Thursday 18 June 2015

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DEVOLUTION (FURTHER POWERS) COMMITTEE
18th Meeting 2015, Session 4

CONVENER

*Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP)

*Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green)

*Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

*Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

*Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Devolution (Further Powers) Committee

Thursday 18 June 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

BBC (Memorandum of Understanding)

The Convener (Bruce Crawford): Good morning, colleagues. Welcome to the 18th meeting in 2015 of the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee.

Agenda item 1 is consideration of a draft memorandum of understanding on the BBC. Following the committee's consideration of the draft memorandum of understanding last week, agreement has been reached between the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government on it. Members have copies of the recent correspondence between the Scottish Government and the UK Government on the particular matter.

I ask our clerk, Stephen Imrie, to bring us up to speed on the sequence of events since we met last week.

Stephen Imrie (Clerk): Thank you, convener. I am happy to provide members with a little bit of background information. I am conscious that we gave members the correspondence only yesterday, so they might not have had an opportunity to read through it yet.

Members will recall that they discussed the draft memorandum of understanding on BBC matters last week. At that stage, there were suggestions from the Public Audit Committee and the Education and Culture Committee about how the MOU could be improved and suggestions from the Scottish Government. Members left the matter last week with discussions to take place between the Scottish Government and the UK Government to see whether the changes to the MOU could be taken on board.

Members have three letters in front of them. There is a letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport dated 15 June; a response from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to the Scottish Government dated 17 June; and a letter from the Scottish Government to the convener dated 17 June that summarises where the two Governments have got to.

As the convener has indicated, the two Governments have reached agreement between themselves. That means that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has accepted the changes that the Scottish Government wanted to make to the MOU and has also accepted the suggestions that the Public Audit Committee wanted to make to it. Some text has also been provided. The department now believes that the MOU delivers

"the spirit and substance of the Smith Commission recommendations".

That was the point that the Education and Culture Committee made.

To summarise, that means that all the other signatories were happy to take on board the suggested changes, and it is now open to the committee to decide its next step.

The Convener: Does any member want to make any comment, or are we all content?

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): I am content. It has been a very welcome development between the two Governments that they have agreed so rapidly on the memorandum of understanding. I am sure that the members of the Education and Culture Committee will be pleased that their views have been taken on board. I am delighted that such a rapid agreement has been reached.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I share Stewart Maxwell's view on that, but there is one point that I would like to reflect on. In the letter that the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs sent to both the convener of this committee and the convener of the Public Audit Committee, Paul Martin, on 8 June, which was in the initial stages of the process, she said:

"I also consider the MoU to be the formal means through which our policy on broadcasting can be progressed".

There is quite an important distinction between the Scottish Government's position on broadcasting and Parliament's scrutiny of the MOU, our role as a committee, and, indeed, the role of the Public Audit Committee, on which I, Stuart McMillan and other colleagues sit. I wanted to put that very important distinction on the record, as it is important to me.

The Convener: I understand that.

As members do not want to make any other comments, are they content to agree the content of the draft memorandum of understanding?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: In that case, a short report will be prepared by the clerks that recommends to the Scottish Parliament that we sign up to the MOU. I

think that that will reach the chamber next week at some stage, if the business managers agree.

10:04

Meeting continued in private until 10:53.

We will now move into private session.

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