



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Social Security Committee

Thursday 30 June 2016

Session 5



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CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL SECURITY WORK PROGRAMME	2
WITNESS EXPENSES	15

SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE

2nd Meeting 2016, Session 5

CONVENER

*Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green)

*Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con)

*Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

*Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Angela Constance (Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities)

Stephen Kerr (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Simon Watkins

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Social Security Committee

Thursday 30 June 2016

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Sandra White): Good morning, everyone. I welcome you all to the Social Security Committee's second meeting in 2016. I remind everyone to turn off their mobile phones, as they interfere with the sound system. We have received no apologies and we are all here, which is great.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking item 4 in private. I will explain to new members why we take some items in private. Item 4 relates to the contents of research, candidates to do research and finances for research, and it is normal practice to discuss such items in private. With the committee's indulgence, do we agree to take item 4 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Scottish Government's Social Security Work Programme

09:01

The Convener: We come to item 2. I welcome Angela Constance, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, who will give evidence for the Scottish Government. From the Scottish Government's social security policy and delivery division, her accompanying officials are Stephen Kerr, social security director, and Anne McVie, deputy director.

I thank the cabinet secretary for the correspondence that the committee has received and for her appearance today. I know that she has a busy schedule. I highlight to members that she is available until 9.45, so if we have one or two quick questions each and if we have quick answers, we will get everyone in. The cabinet secretary will leave this meeting so that she can appear before the Equal Opportunities Committee.

I hand over to the cabinet secretary, who will make an opening statement.

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): Good morning, colleagues. My opening statement will be brief to allow as much time as possible for questions. As the convener said, I will have to leave the meeting to go straight to the Equal Opportunities Committee.

I am particularly pleased that my portfolio allows the opportunity to take a focused approach to social security, communities and equalities. I very much see in our vision of social security something that helps to support strong and sustainable communities and which is there for us all when we need it. Our new powers over social security will play a part in creating genuine equality of opportunity for the people who need our support most.

I recognise the work that the Welfare Reform Committee did in the previous parliamentary session. The evidence-gathering sessions that it put in place for people who were directly impacted by welfare reforms were sometimes harrowing but always valuable and thought provoking.

I am pleased that the committee's name has changed to the Social Security Committee, because language matters. That is an important sign that we are listening to those who feel stigmatised by some of the worst rhetoric about strivers and shirkers.

I will give a brief update on progress. On timescales, I am clear that the most important thing is to take the time to get this right.

Introducing the system will be one of the most complex and difficult policy and delivery operations that the Scottish Government has ever taken forward. The range of benefits that are to be devolved and the work that is required to take forward a social security agency are substantial. My absolute priority is to ensure the safe and secure delivery of benefits so that people can continue to go about their daily lives.

On working with the United Kingdom Government, the committee will have received a read-out of the recent meeting of the joint ministerial working group on welfare. It was a constructive meeting and progress was made on a number of issues. I am particularly pleased that work can progress next month to commence a number of the powers that are in the Scotland Act 2016.

Over the summer, I will launch a consultation on the work that is needed to take forward the first Scottish social security bill. It will be a very wide-ranging consultation that will touch on important policy choices, and it will seek views on how best to deliver our benefits and a range of other issues, from information and advice to residency. I am keen to hear from everyone with an interest in those areas. I would be very happy to hear any ideas that members have on how to support that important consultation.

Alongside the consultation, we will be taking our next steps on the work that is needed to deliver a Scottish social security agency. In the next phase of that work, we will address a number of the practical considerations, including some of the financial, legal and logistical requirements. As the committee will be aware, the Scottish Government has already set out a range of measures that we believe will build a fairer social security system. I believe that those measures will have a real impact in improving the lives of people the length and breadth of Scotland. For the sake of brevity, I will not repeat the relevant commitments, which are detailed in our manifesto and which the Parliament has had some opportunity to debate.

I believe that social security is an investment to support people. I appreciate that members will rightly question me on policy and delivery, but I hope that we can build a consensus on the fact that we have an opportunity to do things differently. I value the role that parliamentarians will play and, in particular, the work that the committee will undertake as we proceed on this journey. I look forward to working closely with the committee in the months and years ahead.

The Convener: Thank you very much, cabinet secretary.

I will open the questioning. You mentioned timescales. We know that the Scottish

Government proposes to introduce a social security bill by May 2017. The implementation dates will be decided between you and the joint ministerial group on welfare. You said that a consultation is to be launched during the summer. Do you have an expected timetable for delivery of the various elements of the new powers that are coming to the Scottish Parliament?

Angela Constance: We are working towards a timetable for delivery. You rightly point out that the vehicle for deciding timescales, progress and approach is the joint ministerial working group. This is a joint programme of work between the Scottish Government and the UK Government. It is important to stress that the transfer of powers is the first step. We will be working hard on a range of workable solutions in the transition period.

From the note that we provided on the meeting of the joint ministerial working group, you will know that tranche 1 of the powers will be commenced—the Secretary of State for Scotland will do that through an order—before the UK Parliament rises for the summer. My officials will work very closely with the Department for Work and Pensions and the UK Government on when the transfer of tranche 2 of the powers will take place.

There are three broad planks to the work: the commencement of the powers; the introduction of the social security bill, which will happen in the first year of the parliamentary session; and the delivery mechanism, which relates to the new agency. It is very much a process.

The consultation will commence in August and last for three months. It will not go on for ever, because we have a parliamentary timetable to work to.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for her opening statement and expressly associate myself with her remarks about the importance of language and rhetoric. Some of the language that has been used by others, which she has rightly condemned, is not the sort of language that I will be using.

I also want to associate myself with the cabinet secretary's remarks about the importance of understanding her brief as covering communities, social security and equality. They are not three different silos, but are very closely related to one another.

I have a couple of detailed questions about the extremely helpful note that the cabinet secretary has provided to the committee about this month's meeting of the joint ministerial working group. First, what is the difference between what is called "Tranche 1" and "Tranche 2"? In paragraph 9 of the note, we are told that tranche 1 comprises

“11 of the 13 sections”

of the relevant part of the Scotland Act 2016. I presume, then, that tranche 2 covers the other two sections. Can the cabinet secretary tell us which of the sections are covered by tranche 2 and which by tranche 1? The note does not actually tell us which provisions are in which tranche.

Angela Constance: Tranche 2 covers sections 22 and 23 of the 2016 act. In essence, I think of tranche 2 as covering existing and on-going benefits—in other words, responsibility for disability, industrial injuries and carers benefits. Section 23 covers benefits for maternity, funeral and heating expenses.

Adam Tomkins: That is very helpful.

I have one other question, cabinet secretary. The last two paragraphs of the same paper refer to two papers that will be prepared for future meetings of the joint ministerial working group: a paper on “flexibilities” in universal credit and a “paper on employability plans”. Are those papers likely to be confidential to the joint ministerial working group, or might we be able to have sight of them in due course?

Angela Constance: I cannot give a very specific answer to that just now, because the papers have not been prepared.

Adam Tomkins: No, indeed.

Angela Constance: Members will appreciate that we want to share as much information as possible, and if we are able to share papers, we will want to do so. However, I am conscious that in and around a massive organisation such as the DWP there can be commercial sensitivities, and although the joint ministerial working group has very clear commitments with regard to notifying committee members about when it will meet and communicating outcomes, the purpose of the group is to provide a space for ministers to work together as ministers and, I hope, to iron out any issues that we might have. It is important that we have that space. That said, I want to share as much as possible.

Adam Tomkins: Thank you.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I have some questions about the joint ministerial working group and the logistical challenges posed by delivery. I note that the group’s terms of reference mention ensuring

“a smooth transition of the new responsibilities to the Scottish Government”.

Do you have any comment on that “smooth transition” and any complexities that might be involved with regard to, say, the quality of the data that the DWP holds in the relevant areas?

Angela Constance: I will make no bones about it—it is all complex. The transfer of some benefits will be more complex than others, with perhaps the most complex area being disability living allowance and personal independence payments. We will need to share information, and we will be very reliant on information—facts and figures, statistics and data—from the DWP.

Indeed, both Governments will want to test the reliability of that as we proceed. There is a genuine willingness on both sides. The first meeting of the joint ministerial group during this parliamentary session was very positive; ministers are very much on the same page and our officials have been working very well with the DWP so far.

09:15

Ben Macpherson: That answers my question in general terms. Specifically, has the DWP commented on the quality of the data? Are you confident about what is being provided? Will that help to ensure a smooth transition?

Angela Constance: I am encouraged by the tone of the discussions that I have had with both DWP staff and ministers, but I have yet to see large chunks of data and that has yet to be tested. I am conscious that the DWP is a very large organisation that is going through a period of substantial change—there is the new state pension and it is proceeding with the roll-out of PIP and universal credit. There are analysts in the Scottish Government whose area of expertise is testing the robustness of data. Do you want to add anything, Stephen?

Stephen Kerr (Scottish Government): When you use the term “data” I think very specifically about people’s personal information—where they live, their postcode and so on—but you might be asking a broader question about the material that the DWP holds that allows us to do our work. If that is what you are keen to hear about, I can tell you that we are quite pleased with the flow of information. We have had to put in place protocols between the DWP and the Scottish Government so that the information can move. There are memorandums of understanding, we have secure areas in the Scottish Government’s systems to hold that information and there are protocols in place for how the information is treated and shared within the Scottish Government. In the work that we are doing, I am happy that we are getting the information that allows us to start to do the detailed planning that the cabinet secretary has referred to.

Ben Macpherson: Thank you.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Thank you for the paper on the joint ministerial working group, cabinet secretary. I have a question on the

timetable and implementation dates. Will the commencement of the powers in tranches 1 and 2 be completed before the Government introduces its bill next May? Will there be any disparity with the timetable for the commencement of providing benefits, or are you looking to commence delivery at a fixed date after the introduction of the bill?

Angela Constance: It is important to distinguish between commencement and delivery of the powers. The legal commencement of powers is the first stage in a process and is some distance away from the delivery of new or existing benefits. It is fair to say that the Parliament will hold legislative competence for a while before we have the responsibility for that delivery—we need to have the mechanisms, the delivery process and our agency up and running. We will have legal responsibility some time before we are in a position to deliver.

We are already on record as saying that we are not going for a big bang approach. We are not going to come to a particular point in time—a particular date in history—and switch on the lights. Our calculations and work to date show that that would increase the risk, and we are about reducing the risk as far as possible. That is why it is important to think of this overall as a period of transition. The delivery of benefits will come on stream in a phased and planned way.

Mark Griffin: I can appreciate that, and I think that it is sensible. Can you give us an indicative timeline for the delivery programme? Which benefits do you expect to come on line first?

Angela Constance: We certainly have some thinking around that. I would be hesitant to give you a hierarchy or an order, but it is fair to say that some benefits—such as, perhaps, the new jobs grant, funeral payments and the topping up of carers allowance—may be easier to implement than others such as DLA and PIP, given some of the issues around them. We will want to come to a timetable, a plan and an order, but I am hesitant to go through each benefit and attach a timeline because we are not yet at that stage. It is something that we will want to bring to the committee so that it can be discussed and indeed tested, but we are very much taking a phased approach. We are not going for a big bang whereby we reach a date in history and switch all the lights on.

The Convener: A number of members have indicated that they want to come in. Mr Adam, is your question on the back of Mr Griffin's question?

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Yes.

The Convener: You can go next, and then I will bring in Mr Lindhurst.

George Adam: You said that there will not be a big bang or a big switch-on. Is it the case that some of the benefits that you are inheriting come from the so-called Tory welfare reform, which is a broken system, if I may be so blunt, and that we have to make sure that we get them right? Especially with DLA and PIP, we are dealing with a lot of vulnerable people who are looking to us to finally get things on the right track. Should we be talking not so much about timelines as about getting the system to work properly for those people?

Angela Constance: I understand why timelines are important to people and why people want to press the Government on our plans and our timelines. We certainly have a clear commitment that the agency will be introduced and be up and running in the current session of Parliament, and we have manifesto commitments. There is a broad programme of activity that we want to pursue over the next five years, but the absolutely priority is to get this right. People rely on getting their benefits, so we need to ensure that they get the right amount of money at the right time. We cannot compromise on that.

Through the Scotland Act 2016, we will get 15 per cent of social security spend. We are taking powers over benefits from a system that has evolved since the post-war period. I think that it is fair to say that it has evolved piecemeal over the past 50 or 60 years. Especially in relation to passported benefits, we have to ensure that the benefits that we take are plumbed in so that the 15 per cent that we get is connected to the remaining 85 per cent. That is particularly complex and we will proceed with caution and care.

All politicians are ambitious and impatient. We want the powers because we want to do things differently, but that has to be tempered by getting it right, because failure is not an option.

George Adam: We are getting only 15 per cent of social security spending and we have to work with a system that already exists. That is challenging.

Sanctions are one of the biggest issues that I hear about all the time, as an MSP, from people who come through my door. You will probably be the same, cabinet secretary. It is one of the things that we cannot touch, if I am correct. Where people in our communities are being sanctioned, it is having a dramatic effect. I have some tragic stories—for example, about a young man who was sanctioned because he went to Aberdeen for a job interview, so he did not turn up. I am sure that all members could tell similar stories. Does that make it even more challenging for you? You have 15 per cent of the sum total, and you are trying to work within that system. We have to deal with real issues including sanctions daily, with examples

such as the young man whom I talked about. What can we do? You cannot change the sanctions side of things. You can create other benefits, but I believe that you are not allowed to make such a change.

Angela Constance: No—we do not have any powers over sanctions. That has been repeated on a number of occasions.

This area is riddled with politics. We will have differences of opinion between the Scottish Government and the UK Government and between political parties and parliamentarians. Of course I would have wanted more social security and welfare powers, but it is important that I focus on what we have.

I try to disentangle the politics—there will be lots of politics in this, as we progress—in debates in the chamber and outwith Parliament, but I have to focus on the powers that are coming our way and on making them work. You are correct that we do not have powers over sanctions.

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): You mentioned strong communities in your opening remarks, and I welcome that approach. I am sure that you agree that voluntary organisations can play a large part in strong communities. I have two questions: one is general and the second is more specific.

First, what are the plans to bring voluntary organisations into the consultation process on implementing the new reforms, with reference to how voluntary organisations can complement the social security benefits system that the Government provides and to how they can work with that system?

Angela Constance: I absolutely agree.

I do not want to go off too much on a tangent, but in my previous portfolios I have had responsibilities for schools and employability programmes. Employability is dealt with by Jamie Hepburn and Keith Brown. Some of the best employability programmes have been person centred and have been run by the voluntary sector.

There is a real role for the voluntary sector, which we have to keep as part of our thinking about the way ahead. The voluntary sector and social enterprise are absolutely crucial in our consultation process for the bill itself and also regarding the broader issues in and around the provision of social security. I am confident that people in those sectors will not be shy about participating in the consultation process. That has to be welcomed.

Gordon Lindhurst: You talk about the provision and then the implementation. One of the issues that has been raised with me by constituents in

Edinburgh and Lothian is the mechanics of how it all fits together and works. Are you going to consider the reform of DWP structures as they operate in Scotland as part of that process?

I can give an example that has been raised with me by local voluntary organisations. Some of the people who work with, volunteer for or, indeed, benefit from the services of voluntary organisations themselves claim benefits of one sort or another. Claiming benefits can be complex for many individuals who seek to claim them, and they receive assistance from people who run voluntary organisations. The difficulty that sometimes arises on the DWP side is the apparent lack of a single point of contact. The head of a voluntary organisation, or the person who is employed by a voluntary organisation to assist with such applications, goes to a DWP office and has to deal with several individuals who may not all be up to speed on the particular issues that arise in relation to applications that are being made. Will that be examined in relation to structuring and the approach to dealing with claimants, including where they can be assisted by people from voluntary organisations who understand their needs?

09:30

Angela Constance: Of course, I am not assuming any responsibility for the DWP. When the new powers are operational, the DWP will continue to have a big presence in Scotland because it will have responsibility for 85 per cent of welfare spending in Scotland. In terms of the DWP's reforms and structures, that work is currently being taken forward, as you would expect, by Stephen Crabb, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I am meeting him next week, which will be the third time that I have spoken to him.

In my discussions with David Mundell—I am sure that he will not mind my sharing this—we are conscious that we will have different agencies and services and that we need them to work together on the ground. There has been some work done in Scotland on co-location of Scottish skills agencies with the DWP, but it has been quite small in scale. Local housing associations have worked very closely with their local authorities and have had a local authority member of staff working in their offices on matters such as discretionary housing payments and the bedroom tax, and they have found that very useful. We will have to explore opportunities for things such as co-location because we do not want people to be passed from pillar to post. As we assume responsibility for the 15 per cent of welfare spending, we will have to ensure that it is streamlined with other services

that we are responsible for, and that it fits with services that we are not responsible for.

On the point that Mr Lindhurst raised about the lack of flexibility, I am conscious that carers feel that some of the criteria and regulations around carers allowance actually make it very difficult for them to work or to study. We have a working group on disability issues that is looking at some of that to inform our thinking as we go forward.

Gordon Lindhurst: Convener—

The Convener: No—I am sorry, but we are running out of time, and another three members want to ask questions. Ruth Maguire is next.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Good morning, cabinet secretary. I would like to know more about the consultation. I welcome the fact that the third and voluntary sectors will be involved, but will we have an opportunity to go out into our communities and speak directly to people who require benefits? Following on from that, what opportunities are there for co-production in the design of benefits?

Angela Constance: Before I answer Ms McGuire's questions, I want to say that I am always willing to engage with members outside committee meetings through correspondence or individual meetings. I have an open door as much as possible and I do not want Mr Lindhurst to feel that he has been thwarted.

Gordon Lindhurst: It is quite all right.

The Convener: I am sure that he does not feel that way.

Gordon Lindhurst: Not at all.

Angela Constance: The point that Ruth Maguire made is crucial. Even with the best will in the world, our consultation document is not going to be a light, brief document. However, we will work very hard—we are in the throes of doing that just now—to ensure that it is as accessible as possible. However, we will definitely have a series of engagement events, which we are planning already. I encourage members to think about how they can engage with their communities and local organisations. What Ms Maguire said is right, because a lot of the consultation will have to be done face to face and will involve speaking to people who have lived experience of the benefits system. I am conscious that there will be people who have literacy difficulties who are not necessarily going to sit down and respond to the many questions in a consultation document; hence the importance of charities and the third sector. They will have insight into community life and the lived experience of individuals. However, as ministers, Ms Freeman and I are absolutely determined to have as much face-to-face contact

as possible with people who actually experience the system.

Ruth Maguire: Does the minister agree with my point about co-production?

Angela Constance: Absolutely. Many partners are involved in this process, and with regard to people with the lived experience of the benefits system, we have already said that we will want to have user panels. I am not sure that that is the right name for them—I am not comfortable with it—but we will just call it a working title. We want to have an on-going engagement with people who have used services, so that they can constantly feed into the process. We also have our partners in local government and in the voluntary and third sectors. We have to recognise that Government cannot do this work alone and that there is no monopoly of wisdom or insight. The ethos of partnership and co-production is very much one that we will take forward.

The Convener: Thank you, cabinet secretary. I am sure that the committee members will be happy to feed into the process as well and that you will look forward to that.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I apologise for missing the cabinet secretary's initial remarks. I welcome and appreciate your open-door offer, cabinet secretary.

It is probably fair to say that if we were starting with a blank canvas there would be opportunities to do things differently, but, obviously, we are constrained by the limitations of what has been devolved. However, we can make big changes to things such as assessment procedures that will not necessarily cost us any more money.

I want to focus on the issue of people who could be recipients but are not at the moment because of the complexities of the system, which are in many cases just another barrier for people who are already experiencing pretty difficult times. The point about co-location was well made. You will be aware, cabinet secretary—I am sure that the convener will be too—of the healthier, wealthier children scheme in Glasgow, which partly involves midwives and health visitors helping families to fill out forms. On average, that increased the amount of benefits that those families received by more than £3,000 in a year. What sort of focus will there be in the consultation and so on to increase the accessibility that you spoke about and to make sure that people receive what they are entitled to?

Angela Constance: That is a very good point. We know from the available information that the take-up rate of some benefits is particularly low. A prime example of that is funeral payments, but maternity allowance has a comparatively low take-up rate as well. Over and above our commitments to new benefits and increasing carers allowance,

we have a clear manifesto commitment to working to improve take-up rates. The work on advice, information and income maximisation is important in this area as well. That is why we are consulting on other areas and not just on the nuts and bolts of what the legislation will look like.

I am very conscious that in these straitened financial times we do not want duplication of effort. We all live with the need for public service reform to improve efficiency and effectiveness, but I am conscious from some of the evidence that I have read that we need services at various entry points to be aware of what people are entitled to and to be able to advise people of that. That is kind of counterintuitive in terms of streamlining processes. We can sometimes have a bit of lazy thinking around one-stop shops—important as they are, because we do not want folk passed from pillar to post. We have to think about the public sector across the piece and ask, for example, whether there are opportunities for our health service to do more to advise women of their rights when we introduce our best start allowance.

People will be familiar with our plans for the baby box. I think that it is fair to say that we need to join up all the dots.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): By the sound of it, I do not think that the word “complex” cuts it. Given the complexity of the issues, there is, unfortunately, the potential for a lot to go wrong, is there not? You have got to think about that. As George Adam said, we cannot have a period when benefit claimants are disadvantaged by the transitional arrangements. Is there a need to put something in the bill to give powers to the agency to account for that, or is there a need for there to be prearrangements before the agency is set up to ensure that claimants do not lose out? Have you done any forward planning on the expertise that you might need to run a new agency and that could assist with the transitional arrangements? Are there any gaps in that regard?

Angela Constance: The agency’s powers and functions will be a crucial part of the legislation. They are also a crucial part of our consultation, although they are not the only part of it. We are conscious that this is uncharted territory for all of us and that there will, indeed, be gaps in expertise and knowledge. We need to have the humility to ensure that, when we come across that, we own it and rectify the situation. Therefore, the working relationship between the Scottish and UK Governments and the ability to tap into the talents and the expertise of the third sector and, indeed, service users are important. Stephen Kerr can add a bit more detail to that.

Stephen Kerr: The need to ensure that people do not lose out is hardwired into our approach. The UK Government’s approach to change is

based around testing, trialling and piloting change before it is introduced. You will all have views on whether it is the right change and whether it works, but we will take that approach, too, so that, as the cabinet secretary says, when the switch is flicked, we have strong certainty that the system will work, that it will talk to the UK Government system and that people will get their money out when they go to the cash machine and put in their card.

I will share a personal story. I have a personal commitment to the work as my mother is a DLA recipient, so I need to ensure that she is not affected by the changes that are going on.

The Convener: You will get it if you do not.

Stephen Kerr: Absolutely—I will get it large. *[Laughter.]*

The Convener: I tried to say that under my breath, but never mind.

Stephen Kerr: I do not mind that being on the record; she will expect it to be on the record, I dare say.

On skills and expertise, part of my key responsibility is to build the capacity of the new organisation in the form of the agency, and being part of the UK civil service is helpful in that regard, because we fish in a wide talent pool. I have just recruited a programme director to take forward the work who has 20 years’ experience in the UK Government of leading large and complex programmes of change with multibillion-pound spending levels. We are looking hard for people and are making sure that the appointments that we put in place give the whole programme the biggest chance of success. We expect to come as a team to talk to this committee from time to time about how the work is going.

The Convener: We are absolutely on time for our 9.45 finish. I thank the cabinet secretary and her team. This is going to be a very interesting committee. As has been said, the topic is complex, but we look forward to meeting the minister again and hearing further evidence, as well as to feeding into any of the programmes and consultations.

Angela Constance: Thank you, convener. My door is always open. Formally, or informally, we want to have as much engagement with all members of the Scottish Parliament as possible. We want that to be an in-depth engagement as we go forward on this joint venture together.

Witness Expenses

09:44

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is on witness expenses. I highlight for new MSPs or others who are unfamiliar with the procedure that the expenses are for the travel or accommodation costs of people coming to give evidence. The committee norm is that, when any expense claims are made, the convener is the person who would say yea or nay. I open up the matter to the committee. Would members like to continue in that vein or would they prefer the committee to see the expenses and make the decisions?

Alison Johnstone: I would be pleased to delegate the responsibility to you.

The Convener: “Delegate”—that was the word I was looking for. Thank you very much, Alison. Do other members agree?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you.

09:45

Meeting continued in private until 10:09.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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