



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 30 June 2016

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Thursday 30 June 2016

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
2nd Meeting 2016, Session 5

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

*Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP)

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

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

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Wands

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 30 June 2016

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:01]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Welcome to the second meeting in 2016 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. Good morning to all the members of the committee. The first item on the agenda is a decision on taking business in private; the business is consideration of the mandatory committees' remits and standing order rule changes. Do members agree to move into private session to discuss those items? Sorry—do members agree to discuss those items in private at our next meeting, after the summer recess?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Cross-party Groups

10:01

The Convener: The second item on the agenda is consideration of the rules on membership of cross-party groups. Section 6.4.1 of the "Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament" requires that each CPG has at least one member of the Scottish Parliament from each of the parties or groups that are represented on the Parliamentary Bureau. In the previous session, a number of CPGs that sought to reregister experienced difficulties in securing full cross-party representation, and it is anticipated that the situation may recur in this session. Members are invited to consider whether they agree to a general modification to section 6.4.1 of the code of conduct to allow CPGs that have at least one MSP member from the majority of parties that are represented on the Parliamentary Bureau to register.

I invite comments from committee members.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I think that the proposal is very sensible. It continues to require members to demonstrate a breadth of political interest in establishing new groups.

The Convener: I think that it will be welcome going forward.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I support the proposal. It is a sensible one and I endorse what Patrick Harvie has said.

The Convener: I invite members to approve the general modification to section 6.4.1 of the code of conduct.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Mandatory Committees (Remit Changes)

10:03

The Convener: Under agenda item 3, committee members are invited to consider remit changes for the mandatory committees. The issue has arisen as a result of a decision by the Parliamentary Bureau and the passage of legislation—the Scotland Act 2016. I invite general comments on the suggestions in the clerk's paper.

Patrick Harvie: Again, I am broadly content with the proposal. There has been a reasonable degree of discussion between the political parties before consensus has been reached on the remits that should be allocated to the newly established committees. I would not have a problem with agreeing the proposal as it stands.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I acknowledge the representations that we have received from external groups regarding equal opportunities and equalities. I suggest that the Equal Opportunities Committee might want to look at the recommendation regarding the frequency of its meetings to see whether it feels that it can deal with its remit adequately and address the concerns that have been raised in those representations.

The Convener: I know that the same representations have been made to members of what is currently the Equal Opportunities Committee. Expanding that committee's remit will not be an onerous task for its convener and members and I am sure that, given that the addition of human rights to its remit is so important, the committee will take cognisance of what has been said and will address the concerns that have been raised.

Patrick Harvie: I understand where the concerns come from, but it is worth noting that, although a number of significant equalities organisations have expressed concerns, many others have not expressed them. It would be perfectly reasonable to ask the clerks or the convener to meet the organisations that have been in touch to discuss their concerns.

The remit of what will be the equalities and human rights committee, if the change is agreed to, compares favourably with the remits of other committees, such as the Justice Committee, which is where human rights issues have traditionally sat. The existing position has been rather limiting by framing human rights arguments always in terms of justice and specifically the criminal justice system.

A long-standing view among human rights advocates and organisations in Scotland has been that a broader understanding of human rights is needed in the parliamentary committee system. What is proposed provides the appropriate way to achieve that.

The Convener: Would you like the convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee to meet the organisations?

Patrick Harvie: That committee's convener could choose to do that, but we should certainly offer the option of meeting this committee, if that is possible.

The Convener: I am happy to do that and I ask the clerks to organise that for next term.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I completely concur. A meeting is exactly what is required to ensure that everyone is involved and can express their views. If there are concerns, they should be raised with the right people, so that everyone understands where we are going and we all move forward in the new structure that we are looking to achieve. That will benefit us all.

John Scott: I will reserve judgment until I see the working paper that is produced. Elsewhere, Patrick Harvie has suggested that there might be more for the Finance Committee to do than is reasonable. I am not sure whether that is the case. I have never served on that committee, so I do not know what its burden of work is. I will withhold my view until we see the working paper.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I echo what Mr Scott said. I would like to see the document in the autumn before I express a view.

The Convener: The suggestion is that we consider after the summer recess a draft report to the Parliament that sets out standing order rule changes and that we do not formally approve the changes today. We will ask the clerks to take back our concerns about capacity to consider the new powers, given that dealing with the new powers should be a normal part of a committee's ordinary working and scrutiny. We are in a fluid situation at the moment and it is difficult to make firm plans about how to proceed, but we also want to ask the clerks to look at how to reflect ministers' remits in the remits of the committees that will normally scrutinise such work. We look forward to having that report in the summer. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: As that was the last agenda item, I hope that everyone will have a summer recess of some kind. I might see you all again soon—we do not know whether Parliament will be recalled. I wish everyone a happy summer.

Meeting closed at 10:09.

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