



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

**Thursday 6 October 2016**

**Session 5**



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



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**STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE**  
**6<sup>th</sup> 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

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con)

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Douglas Wands

**LOCATION**

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)



# Scottish Parliament

## Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 6 October 2016

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

### Cross-party Groups

**The Convener (Clare Adamson):** Good morning and welcome to the sixth meeting in session 5 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I remind everyone to switch mobile phones and other devices to silent.

The first agenda item is on proposed cross-party groups. We will take evidence from Gordon MacDonald MSP on the proposed CPG on independent convenience stores, and then from Jackson Carlaw MSP on the proposed CPG on building bridges with Israel.

I welcome Gordon MacDonald and invite him to make an opening statement on the proposed CPG.

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** Thank you, convener, for the opportunity to attend the committee and to highlight the need for a cross-party group on independent convenience stores. In session 4, 85 cross-party groups were registered, but despite there being such a large number, there was no cross-party group that focused on retailing—in particular, on the independent convenience store sector, which is the lifeblood of many small rural communities and urban neighbourhood shopping areas.

“The Scottish Local Shop Report”, which was published in late 2015, was the first-ever report on the importance of convenience stores to Scotland. The report, which was produced by the Scottish Grocers Federation, found that the majority of the 5,500 convenience stores operating in Scotland are run by small-business owners, and that the sector provides over 44,000 jobs, with a gross added value to the economy of more than £0.5 billion per annum. Scotland has more convenience stores per head than any other part of the United Kingdom, but at present there is no cross-party group that can provide a forum for retailers and their supply chain to interact with MSPs and to raise awareness of the opportunities for the sector and the challenges that it faces.

The importance of the sector is reflected by the number of MSPs who asked to join the group and the number of retailers who attended the inaugural meeting. In total, more than 50 people representing the retail trade took time out from

running their businesses to highlight the importance of establishing the forum. It was agreed that if recognition is granted to the group, sub-groups will be established on the economy, retail crime and community support, which will provide background papers to inform MSPs and form the basis for discussion at subsequent CPG meetings.

In session 4, we had sectoral CPGs covering aviation, construction, oil and gas and Scotch whisky. Retailing is the biggest private sector employer in Scotland, providing 13 per cent of all private sector jobs. Given the number of jobs that the independent convenience store sector provides and its importance to many communities across Scotland, I ask the committee to approve the creation of the new cross-party group.

**The Convener:** Thank you. Do members have any questions?

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** Are there likely to be any overlaps with cross-party groups that are already established?

**Gordon MacDonald:** I am not aware of any cross-party group whose sole focus is the retailing sector. There is a cross-party group on towns and town centres, but the session 4 registration document for that group makes no mention of retailing in its purpose, and the list of members includes only one retailer. More local authorities than retailers are members of that group.

**John Scott:** I notice that Professor Leigh Sparks is a member of the group on towns and town centres, as well. However, that is terrific. Thank you very much.

**The Convener:** Do members have any other questions?

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I would like to declare an interest and put it on the record that I am a member of the cross-party group.

**The Convener:** Thank you. We will consider the issue under item 2 on the agenda and Gordon MacDonald will be informed of our decision as quickly as possible. Thank you for your time this morning.

I invite Jackson Carlaw to the table. Good morning and thank you for coming to committee. I invite you to make some opening remarks.

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Thank you very much, convener.

The Jewish community settled in Scotland at the beginning of the 20th century. Subsequently, many have come here as refugees fleeing persecution, of course. Like all others then, before and since, they should be made to feel welcome and safe in Scotland, without fear or favour.

In the post-war years, the Jewish community amounted to 48,000 people, but it now amounts to just 6,000 souls across Scotland. They are predominantly in the west of Scotland, but there are groupings in Edinburgh and other parts of Scotland.

The Jewish community in Scotland is fiercely loyal. It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of it has visited Israel.

The purpose of the proposed cross-party group is to build bridges with Israel, not to be a cheerleader for the state of Israel. Very strong and passionate concerns are raised about that, and there are concerns across a much wider range of political considerations. Other cross-party groups represent areas in the region that also have challenging political backgrounds, of course.

The proposed cross-party group is designed to do two specific things, the first of which is to build bridges in the culture and economic fields in particular. Culturally, the Jewish community helped to establish the Edinburgh festival in Scotland. Economically, many of the medical pharmaceutical products that we use in this country come from Israel.

Secondly, the proposed cross-party group is designed to tackle anti-Semitism in Scotland. The Jewish community in particular has felt claustrophobic in many respects, and sometimes under pressure. That is very often because of a feeling that, as the community is concentrated in quite limited areas, broader discussions about anti-Semitism and Israel do not take place.

The purposes of the proposed cross-party group are to represent the bridges that can be built and to tackle anti-Semitism in Scotland.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much, Mr Carlaw. I invite questions from the committee.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To understand the purpose of the group, it seems from what you have said and what is written in the paperwork that there are three purposes: to build bridges culturally and academically, for example, as CPGs might do with many other countries; to

“promote an alternative viewpoint to that singular one which is to the fore at present”,

as the paperwork says; and to further

“the goal of countering anti-Semitism”.

Is there a reason why those three distinct purposes are not all reflected in the title of the proposed group and only one is?

**Jackson Carlaw:** No. The intention that underpins the group is specifically to build bridges with Israel across all those fronts—in respect of understanding as well as in respect of the specific

areas of education, culture and business, which I have identified. It is about building understanding with the state of Israel in the broadest sense, and building bridges with the Jewish community in Scotland and Israel.

**Patrick Harvie:** I wonder what you envisage as being the balance between those different aspects. Obviously, presenting

“an alternative viewpoint to that singular one which is to the fore at present”

would perhaps attract people who support the other viewpoint, whereas I hope that all of us, whatever our views on the issues or the actions of the state of Israel, for example, would want to support “countering anti-Semitism”. I hope that that aspect of the CPG’s work is explicitly open to all, regardless of viewpoints on issues regarding Israel.

**Jackson Carlaw:** Yes. The group is not in any way intended to try to create division between members in Parliament. It includes broad representation from a number of political parties. If you look at the groups that have chosen to support it, you will see that it does not seek to focus on the international situation exclusively. Many of the people who seek to represent us have completely different perspectives.

One thing that we talked about in the preliminary meeting was the group’s potential to hold at some stage a joint meeting with the cross-party group on Palestine. It would probably be beyond the ability of the Scottish Parliament and two cross-party groups to resolve an age-old historical problem, of course, but given the title of the proposed CPG, anything that it could do in due course—things would have to be sensibly and carefully handled, with an understanding of what might be achieved—towards building bridges would be welcome.

Regarding the broader agenda of the proposed CPG, I have a great deal of sympathy for the state of Palestine, but I am not a member of the CPG on Palestine. Similarly, if any political grouping or individual felt that they did not wish to support the broader agenda of the proposed CPG, that would not suggest that they were somehow endorsing anti-Semitic behaviour, which I believe the whole Parliament is united against.

**Patrick Harvie:** Thank you. That is very helpful.

**John Scott:** Do you have any indication of the topics that the proposed group might discuss?

**Jackson Carlaw:** We are very keen to reflect at each meeting the cultural aspect of the CPG. Culture in the broadest sense would include, for example, music, drama and other creative arts, and we would try to introduce that cultural aspect to Parliament.

One of a number of areas that we would want to discuss in the group is how the work of the centre for Scotland and Israel relations could be better facilitated, because it is a group of people who are not Jewish but seek to ensure that promotion of Israel takes place across the whole of Scotland. We hope to hear from individuals in the business, culture and education communities who could help to identify the links that we would seek to promote. We have had a lot of interest from people in those areas who would like to participate in that work.

**The Convener:** What is the reasoning behind having a CPG particularly on Israel? Why is it required in terms of what it would cover that other CPGs do not?

**Jackson Carlaw:** A number of CPGs have been formed that represent what I imagine are similar objectives. For example, I know that there is a group on Russia that is seeking to re-establish itself as a CPG. There has been a group on China and there are groups on Taiwan, Palestine, Germany and Poland. Many were underpinned at first by a relatively strong immigrant community who could trace their roots back to the country with which they wished Scotland to develop links. The more such links are promoted, the better.

I have spoken to VisitScotland and the group hopes to discuss with it, as we have with some commercial airlines, the opportunities for development of tourism from Israel. Many people make the journey to Israel from Scotland, but there is also a tremendous opportunity for tourism from Israel to Scotland.

Promotion of individual countries can be progressed through establishment of a cross-party group: I believe that that would be true of the proposed CPG on Israel.

**The Convener:** Okay. There are no further comments or questions from members, so I thank Jackson Carlaw. We will consider the request under the next item on the agenda and inform you as soon as possible of the committee's decision.

**Jackson Carlaw:** Thank you, convener. I am grateful for your time.

**The Convener:** The next item is to consider whether to accord recognition to the proposed CPG on independent convenience stores. Do members have any comments?

**John Scott:** It seems reasonable to have such a CPG. Gordon MacDonald has obviously given the matter a great deal of thought. I wish him every success with the group.

**The Convener:** Thank you. I concur with those comments. Is the committee content to approve the CPG on independent convenience stores?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** We move to consideration of the proposed CPG on building bridges with Israel. Do members have any comments?

**Patrick Harvie:** It is worth reflecting on the fact that Jackson Carlaw has clearly considered some of the potential controversies that could arise from having such a group. As long as it is clear that the ethos that he suggests is the way that the group will work, that those who take a more critical stance on the actions of the state of Israel, or are involved in boycott, divestment and sanctions policies with regard to Israel, would not in any way be excluded from participating in the proposed group's work on countering anti-Semitism, and that there is not seen to be a conflict between those two objectives, I do not have any objection to the creation of the group.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I feel the same. Jackson Carlaw has certainly given us a flavour of what the proposed CPG would try to achieve. There might be a difficult balance to strike, depending on what the group decides to do to attempt to build bridges with Israel. However, I think that the concept would work well and could enhance tourism, culture and so on. I think that the proposed CPG would have a real opportunity to make a contribution.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** I agree with Patrick Harvie and Alexander Stewart.

**The Convener:** Is the committee content to approve having a CPG on building bridges with Israel?

**Members indicated agreement.**

10:15

*Meeting continued in private until 10:55.*





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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