



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 3 November 2016

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Thursday 3 November 2016

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
7th 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:

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Wands

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 3 November 2016

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Cross-party Groups

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning and welcome to the seventh meeting in session 5 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I remind everyone to switch mobile phones and other devices to silent, as they might interfere with broadcasting.

Agenda item 1 is consideration of proposed cross-party group applications. We will take evidence from Gillian Martin MSP on a proposed CPG on women in enterprise, and then from Jamie Greene MSP on a proposed CPG on LGBTI+.

I welcome Gillian Martin to the meeting and invite her to make an opening statement on the proposed group.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Thank you very much, convener.

The proposed cross-party group on women in enterprise aims to establish a forum for the sharing of experiences and information on the position of women in enterprise in Scotland. We want to enable discussion and debate on the gender gap in enterprise, seek solutions on how that might be tackled and bring together partners with an interest in women in enterprise to develop a collaborative approach towards working together.

It has been acknowledged that developing women in enterprise is critically important to Scotland's economy. There is a gap between the number of women and the number of men setting up in business, and that is having an economic effect. If women set up in business at the same rate as their male counterparts, it would mean an increase of about £7 billion for the Scottish economy. We want to establish a group not only to recognise that issue, but to look at ways of tackling it, and we want to provide a forum for women who are thinking about setting up in business and for women who have been successful in business to encourage others.

The Convener: I invite questions from members.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): There is a really strong case for approving

the group's application. It is cross-cutting, and it will be able to draw on other groups for advice and support. Is the group's main aim and real purpose not only to inform people and generate awareness but to inspire women to take part in the process?

Gillian Martin: The CPG has a foot in quite a few camps—skills, the economy and, I suppose, equalities issues—but it will mainly follow an economic and skills agenda. It also cuts into education—at our first meeting, we took evidence on why female graduates are not setting up in business at the rate that we would expect. That is an area that we will look at and draw attention to. We want to be very proactive about getting publicity for our work so that people start to talk about such issues in public.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I have more of a statement than a question. I just want to declare that I am a member of the proposed cross-party group and to thank Gillian Martin for bringing it to our attention.

The Convener: I have a question, Gillian. Did you consider whether the group's objectives could have been met by existing CPGs? Why did you feel it necessary to have a new group with a specific focus on women?

Gillian Martin: When I looked at the list of existing CPGs, I could not identify any with a gender bias. Perhaps "bias" is the wrong word—I could not identify a group that tackled gender. I also sit on the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee, and I have found that, although I am trying to bring gender issues into that committee, there is so much to talk about that there really is not the space to develop the matter fully. The driving force behind the proposal was my wish to have something that focuses directly on women in enterprise. We are not really talking about the pay gap; we are talking about women setting up in business, and we wanted to have a focus that we felt was not being taken elsewhere.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I, too, think that the idea is very good, and I agree with Alexander Stewart's comments. However, I am disappointed to see that there are no Conservatives on the group. Did you approach any Conservative colleagues?

Gillian Martin: I, too, was disappointed about that. I am disappointed that two parties are missing from the group. I approached some female members of the Conservative group to ask them to join but, unfortunately, they did not join. However, the door is always open.

John Scott: Thank you for that reaffirmation of willingness. That is very kind.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I declare that I am another of the founding

members of the group. It is important that we look at inclusivity in enterprise and work. It is absolutely right to look at start-ups, but I hope that the group will consider the issue of women in enterprise more broadly and will not just look at women starting up businesses. The issue of women in leadership roles in big business and in professions is also important. I hope that the group will look at the broad spectrum of gender issues in enterprise and leadership roles across all sorts of organisations in the economy.

Gillian Martin: Yes. We will be strong on mentoring by people who are already successfully running businesses. We want to link up people who are in the start-up phase or maybe just in the small business phase with female mentors who have made a success of their business. That is one thing that we want to look at directly.

The Convener: As there are no more questions, I thank Gillian Martin for her attendance. We will consider the proposed CPG under agenda item 2, and you will be informed of the result as soon as possible.

Gillian Martin: Thank you very much, everyone.

The Convener: I suspend the meeting briefly while the witnesses change over.

10:06

Meeting suspended.

10:06

On resuming—

The Convener: We move on to consider the proposed CPG on LGBTI+. I give a warm welcome to Jamie Greene and invite him to make an opening statement about the CPG.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Good morning and thank you for having me along. It is very odd to be on this side of the table in one of the committee rooms.

With the United States Supreme Court legalising gay marriage in 2015 and Ireland having amended its constitution that same year, it is clear that unprecedented progress is being made for LGBT rights, thanks to the tireless advocacy of the community. That is great news, but the last thing that we can afford to do is to become complacent. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender acceptance has soared in Scottish society, and Scotland is a very inclusive place, but that alone does not equate to true equality. As a society, we are still too quick to label people and put them in boxes.

Despite their contributions to our communities and our country, too many people in the LGBTI

community still face issues such as bullying, mental health problems, sexual health problems, economic discrimination and domestic violence in their daily lives. Therefore, we owe it to them, and to our young generation above all, to do more and to be ever vigilant. There is no time or place to be complacent.

The reaction that I got from people when I told them that I was thinking about setting up the group was remarkably consistent—they often said, “I can’t believe there isn’t one already.” To be honest, when I joined the Parliament, that was my reaction, too. I set up the group with the sole aim of bringing together political parties and parliamentarians, third sector organisations, charities, LGBT groups and individuals who need a voice. We recently held our first meeting to discuss the group’s aims and ambitions. I was told afterwards by someone from a charity who attended the meeting that it was the first time that many such groups had sat in the same room to share ideas, debate agendas and discuss a more joined-up approach to how we can help the community.

In an age when charities and campaign groups are fighting desperately for their own survival, the bigger picture is often forgotten and the smaller voice is lost. The collective outcome is secondary to the individual agenda. If nothing else, the group will bring together a wealth of experience and an unprecedented mix of views and opinions over this session of Parliament. It will seek to inform our lawmakers, influence our decision makers and lead the debate, not follow it. I therefore ask the committee to consider approving the group to send a powerful message to the rest of the world that the Parliament is not afraid to tackle these often difficult and uncomfortable problems head on.

I, for one, will play a proud part in the group and, along with my fellow co-conveners and other members, I hope to make the LGBTI community in Scotland proud that we do not just talk, but act. I hope that that action will start today.

Daniel Johnson: The creation of the group is hugely welcome, and it is extraordinary that it does not exist already. One of the key functions of cross-party groups is to bring outside groups together and to provide a consistent voice, or at least to bring out a different voice. I am very aware that there are a number of different overlapping communities, albeit that they have distinct perspectives. How do you see the role of the group in bringing those voices together and bringing out their diversity so that the Parliament can hear the different perspectives?

Jamie Greene: That is a fair but also very challenging question. You are right—this is my experience, too—that there are many different

organisations in the LGBTI community that often seek to achieve the same outcome. Over the years, I have come across various factions in some of those groups, and it can be difficult.

The purpose of the cross-party group, and one of the benefits of having such a group, is that it will bring people together around the table in an environment in which they would not normally meet. As I said in my statement, after the first meeting, someone said to me—anonymously—how surprised they were, as the groups had never sat around the table together, and how much they enjoyed that platform and the ability, in a closed environment, to share ideas and be honest, rather than fighting for individual agendas. Those people are from charities that are often fighting for the same funding or trying to achieve similar outcomes. I therefore think that we must create the group.

It is important that the group gives everyone a fair and equal voice: whether they are from a large well-funded organisation or a small local group, everyone should be able to chip in.

In our work programme and agendas, we are looking at ways of ensuring that the group's meetings and discussions are not dominated by just one or two themes. Although there are some very important themes that must be discussed, other issues that are new to me also need to be discussed. For example, we talked about geriatric care for older gay people who live alone or in care homes, and about the health or support facilities that are available to people who live in rural communities. There are lots of other issues that are not necessarily mainstream and which we have to give a voice to. Facilitating that will be a challenge, but the purpose of having four co-conveners is to ensure that the group is as neutral as it can be.

Alexander Stewart: I commend you for bringing the proposal to the committee today. The group is a real opportunity for the political community and the outside community. We have our part to play in the process and, by having the group, we will have a platform. How do you plan to promote, publicise and use that platform to benefit the communities that you are trying to represent and bring closer to the political domain?

Jamie Greene: That is a good question. The fact that the group will meet in the Parliament is a good start. For some people, it will be the first time that they have had direct access to parliamentarians.

It is important that our work programme shadows the Scottish Government's legislative agenda. We will look at the timelines for the introduction of bills and we will debate and discuss bills that have an LGBTI element.

It is an open group. The invitation is there to members of any political party and to people of any gender or sexual orientation to participate in the group.

I am pleased to say that there has been a lot of interest in the group from people from across the political spectrum who might not want or have time to be a member of the group but who still want me to report back on what is discussed because it might affect issues to do with health, education, equality or the economy—the group will potentially touch on lots of different areas. The group will give people a unique opportunity to come in and have their voice heard in the public sphere.

On promoting the group, it will be up to each member to do their best to let people out there know about it. I am sure that the group will discuss how we want to manage that by getting the word out, through social media and an online presence, that we are here and that anyone is welcome to be part of the debate in the group.

10:15

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I join other committee members in commending Jamie Greene and congratulating him on bringing the group forward. I, too, am surprised that there has been no such group before.

I want to pick up on a specific point in Jamie Greene's submission, which states:

"We are also taking on some of the functions of other groups which no longer exist in S5, such as the Blood Borne Virus group."

I declare an interest, in that I and other members, including the deputy convener of the committee, are in the process of re-establishing that group. The blood-borne virus issue is certainly a very pertinent and important one for the new LGBTI+ CPG to take up, but I think that we would agree that issues to do with blood-borne viruses and sexual health go much further—for example, hepatitis C is well referenced in the Scottish Government's blood-borne virus framework. Does Mr Greene foresee any conflicts between the LGBTI+ group and the blood-borne virus group, or would they be able to co-operate and work together?

Jamie Greene: The information that I had when I submitted my proposal was that the blood-borne virus group was unable to get off the ground and that those interested in the cause were looking for other means of promoting it. Luckily, before today's meeting, I heard that the blood-borne virus group is looking to re-establish itself, which I am very pleased about. You are right that that group would have a wider agenda than just the LGBTI community and would have a lot of work to do.

I do not think that there would be any conflict between the two groups—if anything, we would be able to help each other. I would like to think that, if we held a meeting that was dedicated to blood-borne viruses, people from your group could come along and be involved in the debate. Equally, if part of your group's work programme covered the LGBTI community, someone from our group could go along and join that debate. I do not foresee any restrictions on crossover. The groups should probably share information about their plans and what they are trying to achieve in their subject areas to ensure that there is no duplication. However, I would like to think that we would be able to help each other, where possible.

The Convener: As a member of a cross-party group that has had several joint meetings with different groups, I emphasise that we do not work in isolation. I encourage members to look for opportunities to hold joint CPG meetings.

We will take a decision on the proposed LGBTI+ CPG under agenda item 2. You will be informed of our decision in due course, Mr Greene. Thank you for your attendance. I will suspend the meeting briefly to allow you to leave.

10:18

Meeting suspended.

10:18

On resuming—

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of the proposed CPGs. I invite members' comments on the proposed CPG on women in enterprise first.

Alexander Stewart: The proposed group's subject matter cuts across many sectors, as Gillian Martin indicated in her evidence. There is a real opportunity for us to engage with the group and do all that we can to promote and publicise it.

The group would be a great asset. The people who would be on it are also quite innovative, which would help to promote the issues. I am very content that it would be an excellent group to establish.

Clare Haughey: I echo Alexander Stewart's comments. This is a fantastic opportunity for cross-party working to encourage women in business and to assist them to grow their businesses. I whole-heartedly support the establishment of the CPG.

John Scott: I agree. I also support the formation of the group. It is a very worthwhile idea.

The Convener: Are we content to approve the establishment of the cross-party group on women in enterprise?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will now consider the proposed cross-party group on LGBTI+. I invite members' comments.

Alexander Stewart: The Parliament has been here for 17 years and I am staggered that we do not have such a group already. Comments were made about people being surprised about that; rather than being surprised, I am slightly horrified about it, because it proves that we were not reaching all the people who require support, help and advice. The group will do that. It will bring together individuals and organisations that require support but which sometimes feel very isolated. As I say, I am staggered that there has been no such group, but I am delighted that we are—I hope—going to have one.

Tom Arthur: The proposal is very timely. We have made fantastic progress in recent years but, as Jamie Greene said, it is important that we do not rest on our laurels but continue to drive the issues forward. I am fully supportive of the group.

The Convener: To an extent, I regret that either of the groups is necessary, because if we had full equality in our society neither of them would have a role to play. However, as we do not live in an ideal society, both groups could make a very positive contribution.

Do members agree to the establishment of the CPG on LGBTI+?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Before we move into private session, I ask members of the press and the public to leave the gallery.

10:21

Meeting continued in private until 11:05.

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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