



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 17 November 2016

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Thursday 17 November 2016

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
8th 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:

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Wands

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 17 November 2016

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Cross-party Group

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning. Welcome to the eighth 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 may interfere with broadcasting.

The first item on today's agenda concerns a cross-party group. I welcome Ross Greer MSP, who is here to discuss the proposed cross-party group on Kurdistan, and invite him to make an opening statement.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Thank you. It is nice to see the view from this end of the table.

I will be exceptionally brief. The cross-party group on Kurdistan is being set up because it concerns an area of interest that was not previously covered by a cross-party group. The Kurdish community in Scotland is active politically and culturally. The cross-party group will give the community a route by which it can engage with the Parliament and MSPs. It will also give us an opportunity to reflect on the history of the region that is Kurdistan and on the rapidly developing situation there at the moment. Kurdistan is split between the current borders of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, so the Kurdish population has been significantly affected by the Arab spring, the conflict against Daesh, the changing political situation in Turkey and so on. The cross-party group will give us the opportunity to reflect on those issues and on Scotland's relationship with our Kurdish community.

The Convener: Do members have any questions?

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): You say that the Kurdish community is vocal and visible. How do you plan to tap into that, and what developments do you see coming from that?

Ross Greer: There is a Kurdish community centre in Edinburgh. The idea is that that would be one of the hubs through which we would engage with the community, involving the folk who organise through that community centre.

The community is split between the communities of the four different states—there is a Turkish-Kurdish community, a Syrian-Kurdish community and so on. We are looking to engage with each of those communities in turn. One of our proposals is that, assuming that we meet four times a year, half of each of those meetings would be set aside to look at the particular culture of one of the four regions. We are also exploring the opportunity of perhaps having a display or an exhibition of Kurdish culture in the Parliament. I know that the cross-party group on Tibet is pursuing the idea of having such a display, too.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I do not think that anyone can be in any doubt about the issues that are involved and the relevance of the Kurdish people. As you point out, they are involved in the struggle against Daesh and have faced persecution from regimes. Discussion of the issues around the Kurdish community is welcome, but, obviously, there might be points of controversy with other countries. How do you propose to navigate that and deal with those sensitivities, if I can put it in that diplomatic language?

Ross Greer: The issue certainly involves a certain amount of diplomacy. I spent two hours with the Turkish consul general yesterday discussing developments regarding Turkey's Kurdish community and the number of Kurdish MPs who have found themselves in jail in recent weeks.

This is an area in which we have to engage carefully. The point has been raised with us that members of the Kurdish community might not attend meetings if, for example, representatives of some of the Governments of the four countries that I mentioned were present. We will take guidance from the Kurdish community in that regard.

As part of our activities outwith Parliament, we want to engage with, for example, the Turkish consulate, as I did yesterday. However, we will have to be extremely conscious of the issues, as is the case with other cross-party groups, such as the cross-party group on Russia, which is acutely aware of who might or might not attend from our Russian community if a representative from the Russian consulate were in attendance.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): As far as I am aware, there are no plans for a cross-party group on asylum and refugee issues. Obviously, many people from the Kurdish community in Scotland will have come here through that route, while others will have arrived here some time ago through a different route. To what extent do you anticipate that the group will engage with those issues, as opposed to engaging with Kurdistan as a country?

Ross Greer: We certainly want to consider those issues. We had an informal meeting yesterday to start sketching out ideas for what could make up some of the meetings over the next year, and we want to explore the individual stories of Kurdish refugees who have settled in Scotland, as well as the wider issue, particularly in relation to the deal on refugees that the European Union has made with Turkey. That affects Kurdish people in particular, because of the relationship that they have with Turkey. The media often portrays Turkey as a kind of middle ground for those seeking conflict in the middle east, but many Kurds flee conflict in Turkey. We will certainly explore that topic.

The Convener: As there are no further questions, I thank Ross Greer for his attendance. Normally, I would ask a question at this point about cross-over with other cross-party groups, but I see that you have addressed that in your submission—thank you.

I suspend the meeting briefly to allow you to leave, Mr Greer. We will then consider the cross-party group application and inform you of our decision in due course.

10:05

Meeting suspended.

10:06

On resuming—

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of the proposed cross-party group on Kurdistan. As members have no comments on the issue, are we happy to support the proposal?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: There is unanimous agreement that recognition of the cross-party group on Kurdistan is approved by the committee.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I should declare an interest, in that my name is mentioned as one of the members of the group.

The Convener: Thank you. We now move into private session.

10:06

Meeting continued in private until 10:18.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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