



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 29 June 2017

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Thursday 29 June 2017

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
13th Meeting 2017, Session 5

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

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

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Wands

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 29 June 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Cross-party Group

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning and welcome to the 13th meeting in 2017 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I remind everyone to switch electronic devices to silent.

This is John Scott's final committee meeting. I thank him very much for his service to the committee and wish him all the best in his new duties in the Parliament.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Thank you. It has been an absolute pleasure serving on your committee, convener.

The Convener: Thank you.

Item 1 is consideration of the proposed cross-party group on women's health. I welcome Monica Lennon MSP to the committee and invite her to make an opening statement about the proposed group.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Good morning, convener and committee, and thank you for having me along today.

I will try to be brief. I hope that the name of the proposed group makes clear what we are all about. We feel that there is a need to give more attention to a range of health issues that only, predominantly or disproportionately affect women. We have a good group of people, who can inform the Parliament and other policy makers.

I am a new MSP, and this is the first time that I have been involved in setting up a cross-party group. I have been encouraged by the interest from members across the Parliament and external stakeholders. Our initial meeting was very well attended, and there is an abundance of topics that people want to explore.

We have common interests with other cross-party groups, but we hope that that is a benefit and that we can work with other groups, particularly those that have an interest in health, such as the cross-party group on health inequalities and the cross-party group on mental health. I hope that the proposed group will be a positive addition to the Parliament.

The Convener: Thank you. I invite questions from members.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I have been doing a bit of research into the number of cross-party groups in the Parliament. We have about 94, of which 25 are health related. There are 129 members of the Scottish Parliament, so getting to cross-party group meetings is a challenge.

However, I like the idea of a cross-party group that focuses on women's health. As you said, there will be some crossover with the cross-party group on mental health, for example. How do you propose to co-ordinate work? Do you plan to have joint meetings?

Monica Lennon: Initially, as we get established, we have enough topics to be getting on with to justify having our own meetings. In future, there would be benefits in having joint meetings, particularly given the demands on MSPs' time.

I am the convener of the proposed group, and I am very committed to it, as is Alison Johnstone, the vice-convener, who is a very experienced MSP.

There are many members' business debates, and we all take part in them. I had a conversation with Kenneth Gibson MSP, whose debate on endometriosis was illuminating, because we learned that as many women are affected by endometriosis as people are affected by diabetes. There is a cross-party group on diabetes and there is a lot more public awareness of diabetes.

There is plenty of interest in having a group on women's health. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy has committed secretariat support, so we think that we will be quite a well-organised and well-resourced cross-party group.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As you said, lots of work could be done across the whole area. If your group goes ahead, how will you prioritise? What will your main goals be for the first six months or year, to ensure that you can capture that abundance of issues that you mentioned while streamlining your work to make it relevant? Work can get diluted if other groups are doing the same thing and you are trying to accommodate that. How will you ensure that your cross-party group can be identified as having a real, main purpose?

Monica Lennon: That is a good question. After the first meeting, the challenge was that there were dozens of topics that people wanted to raise. However, the topics are distinctive and I am not aware of any of them being explored in depth at other cross-party groups.

I mentioned endometriosis, and if we are looking at diseases such as ovarian cancer there seems

to be a recurring issue about the identification of symptoms, so there is an educational issue for the medical profession. Other topics have been raised about access to reproductive health and rights for disabled women and, again, no other cross-party groups are looking at those topics. There is also the question of how we improve attendance at smear tests.

I have done some work on access to sanitary products and I have also looked at access to incontinence products. Some issues have been raised by physiotherapists that link back to mesh implants and I know that the Parliament is well aware of that issue. There might be other cross-party groups that are looking at the mesh situation.

The group is about the experience of women as they try to access healthcare, the barriers to that, such as availability of childcare, and the impact of gender-based violence and domestic abuse. There is also mental health, which is an example of a topic on which we could speak to the relevant cross-party group.

The Convener: There are no other questions, so I thank you for your attendance at the committee. You will gather that the committee is concerned about capacity, given the number of cross-party groups. Nonetheless, we will deliberate on the merits of your proposal in its own right. We will take a decision at agenda item 2 and you will be informed of our decision as quickly as possible.

Monica Lennon: Thank you. I am grateful for your time.

The Convener: We move to agenda item 2, which is consideration of whether to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group on women's health. Do members have comments?

It is probably worth putting on the record that I am involved in the cross-party groups on inflammatory bowel disease and on multiple sclerosis, which have been looking at collaborating on a meeting about continence issues. If we agree to the proposed cross-party group, it could be involved in that meeting, too.

John Scott: My colleague Emma Harper raised the suggestion that, a year into this parliamentary session, we are reaching the point at which we have quite a lot of cross-party groups. The attendance at cross-party groups will determine whether they survive; it is the survival of the fittest. However, the proposed group is a perfectly good one and I am in favour of it being set up.

Emma Harper: I agree with John Scott. It is very valid to look at the specific issues that Monica Lennon has outlined. My concern is that there are a lot of cross-party groups so, as we move forward, we might need to review the processes

and challenges for cross-party groups. I am a member of the cross-party groups on diabetes, lung health, and heart disease and stroke, and it is a challenge to get colleagues along to make meetings quorate.

The Convener: When the annual returns come back to the committee, we will see whether cross-party groups have met their criteria. Perhaps we could look at that in the future if it becomes more of an issue.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Likewise, whether we look at the sustainability of particular groups or of groups in general, one of the things that we should perhaps point out to members is that it is in their gift to organise one-off events, or even a series of events, with outside organisations in Parliament and to stop short of forming a CPG. A CPG is not the only vehicle for discussing issues in Parliament outside of committees and the chamber. We could also think about the other avenues that are available for promoting issues.

The Convener: That is a point well made.

Alexander Stewart: I agree with Emma Harper; the group will attract a good number of topics and people. The groups that have already been established might wither on the vine because of that, but that is just the process that we find ourselves in. It has been identified that time is precious for us all, and to have organisations spread too thinly across a number of cross-party groups is not good for them either. If they have the time and the talent to focus on one or two, that might benefit even more people. By the nature of the way in which we work, I am sure that a review will take place, but we need to look at how successful some of the cross-party groups are.

The Convener: Is the committee interested in having a review in October or November, when a lot of the initial groups that were set up will have done their annual returns?

Alexander Stewart: That is a very sensible idea. It would give us an overview of which groups are managing and coping, and which are struggling.

John Scott: Notwithstanding that—if you will indulge me in my final meeting—it should be a gentle review, because we must encourage that type of activity as a Parliament. It enhances and gives strength and depth to a Parliament to have that added interest and information gathering. It might be the case that there is an optimum number of cross-party groups to be arrived at—perhaps once we reach 100 or something like that, that would be the optimum number. We should be very gentle.

The Convener: The committee will come back to that later. Do members agree to recognition of the proposed cross-party group on women's health?

Members *indicated agreement.*

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

10:11

Meeting continued in private until 10:51.

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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