



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 25 October 2018

Session 5



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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
18th Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 25 October 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Decisions on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Bill Kidd): Good morning, everyone. The meeting start time was meant to be 9.30, so we are doing extraordinarily well. I welcome you all to the 18th meeting in 2018 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. We have received apologies from two members—Elaine Smith and Mark Ruskell. I hope that they will both be back next week and that everything is fine with them.

The first item on the agenda is a decision on whether to take business in private. Item 5 is on two complaint reports from the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland, and item 6 is consideration of a draft report. Do members agree to take those items in private?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Item 2 is to ask the committee to make another decision on taking business in private. The committee is to decide whether to take consideration of reports from the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland, and of the committee's draft reports on the complaints concerned, in private at future meetings. Do members agree to do that?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-party Group

09:31

The Convener: The first actual business, under agenda item 3, is consideration of an application for a cross-party group. We will hear evidence on the proposed cross-party group on St Andrew's day. I welcome Tom Arthur, who would be the convener of the proposed group, and invite him to make an opening statement about the purpose of the group.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Good morning. Having served on the committee for two years, it is a pleasure to be back. I congratulate you on your appointment, convener.

I will, by way of introduction, give a bit of background on the proposed cross-party group. Dennis Canavan, who was an independent MSP until 2007, secured unanimous support in Parliament for the passing of his St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill, which became an act at the beginning of 2007. That act made provision for public bodies and businesses to recognise 30 November—or the following Monday, if the 30th falls on a weekend—as a public holiday. However, it does not compel businesses or banks, for example, to recognise it as a bank holiday. It gives provision in respect of a local holiday.

I was approached by Dennis Canavan, who has a long-standing interest in the subject and has been pioneering and spearheading efforts to get greater recognition of St Andrew's day, both as a holiday and as a cultural event, through the St Andrew's day campaign committee. Dennis approached me shortly after the summer recess. He had been working on establishing the cross-party group with Christina McKelvie. However, Christina McKelvie was appointed as a minister before the summer recess. Consequently, I was asked by Christina and Dennis to take the group forward.

We had our first meeting some weeks ago. It was well attended, and there was a great deal of enthusiasm and energy, with clear cross-party interest, as is illustrated by the range of MSPs who have agreed to join the proposed group.

The purpose of the group, as outlined, is first to promote celebration of St Andrew's day more generally. As Dennis Canavan has eloquently stated many times in public, St Andrew's day does not have the same status and recognition in Scotland that national holidays in other countries have—for example, France, where Bastille day is seen as a pivotal celebration, the United States, where independence day and thanksgiving are seen as pivotal celebrations and, closer to home, Ireland, with St Patrick's day. There was a clear

aim and desire to promote St Andrew's day as a public holiday to encourage more businesses and public bodies to take it up and to encourage greater participation.

It is also seen as a chance to bring people together to celebrate Scottish culture, heritage and history, our diversity, our international connections across the Scottish diaspora and the immense contribution that all new Scots make.

I referred to the range of members of the group; there is an international component to it. St Andrew is celebrated not only in Scotland; he is also the patron saint of countries including Ukraine, so there is a clear international interest in the matter, too. Encouraging celebration of St Andrew's day helps to connect Scotland globally in celebrating that shared link. That will be a key aspect of the group.

I will highlight some of the key themes that we would look to work on. One is the winter festivals programme, which is book-ended by St Andrew's day and Burns night. There is the charity Glasgow the Caring City's event, with which many members will be familiar, and in which there are huge congas in Hampden park and around schools. It is a great opportunity for families, communities and schools to come together to celebrate Scotland's diversity in an inclusive manner. There is also the St Andrew's fair Saturday celebration, which is a nice counterpoint to small business Saturday in that it celebrates fairness and diversity in communities.

Another theme is the desire to recognise St Andrew's day as a school holiday. I have referred previously to promoting Scotland's international connections through St Andrew's day.

This topic, theme and cause has consistently gained and maintained cross-party support across Parliament since the 2007 act was passed. I am happy to answer questions.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Just as Tom Arthur started speaking, I remembered to turn the sound off on my phone so that I did not interrupt him. Anyone else who has not done so should do the same.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I want to highlight two things. One is a question and the other is something to which I am looking for a solution. There are 104 cross-party groups, all competing for MSPs' time, space and so on. How confident are you that people will continue to be able to attend the group? The St Andrew's day group, unlike a lot of the other groups, relates to a specific day of the year. Would it therefore be more popular closer to that time than it would be further away from it? I appreciate that a lot of work has to be done ahead of the day, but how confident are you that you would be able

to keep the interest of MSPs in particular, and how confident are you that they would find the time to attend?

Tom Arthur: Those are excellent questions; I am aware that the committee has been considering that issue for a long time. There has been sustained interest in the subject. The St Andrew's day campaign committee that was led by Dennis Canavan sustained interest within and outwith Parliament for a considerable time, so I feel that momentum exists.

On the second point, interest will clearly be focused on St Andrew's day itself. However, as we are all aware, preparing for and highlighting such events is a year-round task. Although the CPG, if it were to be approved by the committee, would garner more interest in the autumn as we approach St Andrew's day, I believe that it would sustain interest throughout the year from members whose communities are looking to explore ways in which they can plan for St Andrew's day.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: One of the main reasons for cross-party groups is to inform MSPs. Could responsibility for promoting St Andrew's day—which, I think, we all agree should be done—be covered by public bodies including VisitScotland, EventScotland and Creative Scotland? Do you hope to have them involved? Are you looking to create an overarching committee or campaign to do that? Does that need a cross-party group?

Tom Arthur: Again, that is a fair question. We want the group to be as diverse and inclusive as possible, so we will reach out to those bodies. Part of the purpose of the group is to allow a range of stakeholders that might not have such direct access and contact to come together, so the group would give communities at the grass roots an opportunity to contribute ideas and to share their vision of how St Andrew's day could be celebrated. As well as having that campaigning purpose, the group would provide a forum for generation of ideas about, and approaches to, St Andrew's day.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): You have an impressive list of non-MSP members of the group. When you introduced the topic, you mentioned the winter festivals programme, which I think is a bit central-belt centric. I am absolutely in favour of the group, because it is a pity that St Andrew's day is not celebrated more in our country, and the work that Dennis Canavan has done needs to be taken to the next level. What steps will you take to ensure that the festival is truly national, not just Glasgow or central-belt centric?

Tom Arthur: That is also a very good question, and a fair point. There are two aspects: the work

of the cross-party group and the ideas that it promotes. As cross-party groups meet most often and most commonly in Edinburgh, that can present challenges of accessibility for people from rural communities in the Borders and the north of Scotland, or from the islands. The cross-party group would be very open and welcome to exploring ways in which to be as inclusive as possible, whether through people being able to dial in to meetings or by taking the CPG on the road and meeting in other towns and cities.

To an extent, that answers Maureen Watt's second point. To make St Andrew's day as national and inclusive as possible—not concentrating on the central belt—it is vital that we include the voices in those other communities and the diverse ways in which they might choose to celebrate St Andrew's day. The cross-party group would provide a forum for many individuals, communities and groups throughout Scotland to contribute. In doing so, they will help to shape the strategy to make St Andrew's day celebrations more inclusive, so that they truly reflect all the rich tapestry of Scotland.

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): In some ways, you have answered my question, but I am still a bit concerned that having a cross-party group would rather take the wind out of the possibility of developing all the St Andrew's day events and activities outside Parliament. It seems to be more about making the country do something than about informing Parliament. We know what St Andrew's day is and what can be done. In some ways, would having a cross-party group not take power away from people by restricting or diverting their activities?

Tom Arthur: That is a fair point. I will address the concern by saying that the CPG would be but one tool in the toolbox and one available option for people. Communities throughout Scotland will choose to celebrate St Andrew's day in their own ways, and clearly there will be some thematic commonality throughout the country. However, the cross-party group will provide a forum for stimulation of ideas about how St Andrew's day can be celebrated, and for proposals and strategies to be put forward.

The group would give communities access to a range of MSPs and, as we all know from our respective constituencies and regions, MSPs can use their status as leverage to promote outcomes. The group will provide an opportunity for MSPs to become more informed and to gain more understanding of how St Andrew's day is celebrated. That could be particularly useful in that MSPs from one part of the country could be exposed to ideas from another part of the country through the cross-party group. Consequently, they will be able to share those ideas with groups in

their constituencies or regions to help with proliferation of ideas about how St Andrew's day can be celebrated and, fundamentally, to encourage networking and the building of relationships and contacts.

Tom Mason: Bearing in mind my criticism that the group might take authority away from other organisations, how would you measure the success of the group?

09:45

Tom Arthur: There will be a grass-roots element and the group will not just be reliant on public bodies having officially sanctioned events. It will be about communities, charities, third sector and other organisations coming together—both in communities and nationally—to work.

How we measure success is a key question. We are now almost 12 years on from the passing of the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Act 2007. Success can be measured in several ways: the number of businesses and public bodies that recognise and use the St Andrew's day holiday; the number of events taking place; public perception of and attitudes to St Andrew's day more generally; and businesses that do not take St Andrew's day off having thematic events. For example, given that our bar and restaurant sector often pays a great deal of attention to St Patrick's day, one indicator of success might be that level of attention being paid to St Andrew's day. Thematic events taking place in businesses as well as businesses taking the holiday would be indicators of uptake of interest in the St Andrew's day holiday.

The Convener: Thank you. Should the group be accorded recognition, would you consider that success would mean that the group was no longer required, because you had passed on the baton and all those other groups and societies would be doing everything without being prompted?

Tom Arthur: That is an excellent point, with which I agree whole-heartedly. That would be the ultimate signal of success for the endeavours of the cross-party group and of people across Scotland who want to promote St Andrew's day to give it the recognition that it truly deserves.

The Convener: Thank you for your attendance. As there are no other questions, the committee will consider whether to approve the application for a St Andrew's day cross-party group and we will inform you of our decision thereafter.

Tom Arthur: Thank you.

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is a discussion on whether to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group on St Andrew's day. Do members have any comments on that?

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie)

(SNP): I did not pose any questions, however, I think that there is clearly a need to promote St Andrew's day and there is no question but that there is work to be done. I cannot think of another body that would take the matter on board, run with it and give it the exposure that it needs. I have a lot of time for Dennis Canavan and how he has proceeded. It has been a long shift for him. We are not talking about a one-off event, and there would be a lot of work to be done leading up to events.

It is now getting into the Scottish psyche that celebrating achievements in Scotland and recognising things that we would not normally highlight show that there are many ways to make a country. I fully support the group and wish it well.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Your final point was very apt, convener: the success of the group will mean that it does not need to exist in the future. I mentioned bodies including EventScotland that could be doing more. Until St Andrew's day is being promoted better, I have no issues with the cross-party group.

The Convener: Do members agree that the St Andrew's day cross-party group should be recognised?

Tom Mason: On balance, yes.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will inform Mr Arthur of our decision.

09:49

Meeting continued in private until 11:09.

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