



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 8 November 2018

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Thursday 8 November 2018

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
CROSS-PARTY GROUP	2

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
20th 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:

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 8 November 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:31]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Bill Kidd): I welcome committee members to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 20th meeting in 2018. We lack one of our members, but I am sure that she is on her way.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Do members agree to take in private item 4, which relates to correspondence that has been received on acting conveners?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-party Group

09:31

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of an application for recognition from a proposed cross-party group on Japan. I welcome Dean Lockhart, who would be the group's convener. I invite him to make an opening statement about the group's purpose.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before the committee. The cross-party group on Japan would make an important contribution in a number of ways. Scotland has increasing links with Japan in a number of areas, including trade, foreign direct investment, education, culture and sport.

On trade, Japan is a major export market for Scotland and is the fourth-largest investor in Scotland. There are opportunities for Scottish businesses in a number of sectors to increase trade with Japan. In education, an increasing number of Japanese students are coming to educational establishments in Scotland, including high schools as well as higher education institutions. In culture and sport, ties are increasing between the countries. The rugby world cup will be held in Japan, which will also host the next Olympics.

The proposed cross-party group would work with key stakeholders and organisations to promote all such links and to promote in Parliament a better understanding of the links between the two countries.

The Convener: I invite questions from members.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Would the proposed group be the first cross-party group on Japan in the Parliament?

Dean Lockhart: No. I understand that cross-party groups on Japan existed in previous parliamentary sessions. In a sense, the proposal is to reintroduce such a group.

Gil Paterson: Given what you have described, I am surprised that such a group was not maintained—perhaps you can enlighten us about that. I concur with you about the importance of having a good connection between Japan and Scotland. Until the second world war, Scotland had a close relationship with Japan. A lot of Scots went there, including a lady from Kirkintilloch who was involved in setting up the whisky company that became Suntory, and some big conglomerates had Scottish connections.

I very much support what you are doing, but I am surprised that such a group fell away in the first place. That is not your responsibility, but do you know why that was the case?

Dean Lockhart: I think that the members who were involved with the previous cross-party group were not able to take it forward.

I agree that there is a real need to look at and increase the ties between Scotland and Japan, and I am keen to do that.

The Convener: I welcome Maureen Watt, who has just arrived. We are talking about the proposed cross-party group on Japan. You are now up to speed.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I apologise for being late. I left my pass at home.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank Dean Lockhart for coming to the meeting.

I certainly do not have any objection to there being a cross-party group on Japan. However, we already have quite a number of cross-party groups, and I wonder how members will be able to cover them all. It seems from what Dean Lockhart has outlined that there is a reason and purpose for having a cross-party group on Japan.

I am interested in the term “cross-party group”. That usually indicates that the office bearers are from different parties, but the convener and the deputy convener of the proposed group would both be from the Conservative Party. That may happen in other cross-party groups, but I do not know. I think that that would be a bit unusual. Have you thought about that?

Dean Lockhart: That is a good question. That is certainly not by design; it is a result of wanting to establish a cross-party group a bit later on in the session and other MSPs having a lot of other commitments. We did not intentionally set out to do that, and I would be very happy to have another look at that, and to increase the participation of other parties in it, if and when the group is up and running.

Elaine Smith: Okay.

The Convener: Elaine Smith made a good point. I clarify that other cross-party groups have similar arrangements. The matter is not covered by the code of conduct, so it is allowed. However, that was a very good point that I had not thought about at all.

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome Dean Lockhart.

What would the group’s knowledge of the Japanese language be? Would it travel to Japan

for the various events that are beginning to take place involving Scotland and Japan?

Dean Lockhart: We certainly have no plans for any travel. The group is strongly supported by a number of stakeholders, including the Asia Scotland Institute, which is a leading organisation in Scotland with the role of increasing links with not only Japan but Asia in general. The group secretariat would be supported by David Birrell, who is the chief executive of the Asia Scotland Institute. We have a strong base there.

I speak a little Japanese. I worked in Tokyo for two years, so I have a bit of experience of Japan, but I will not try to speak Japanese this morning.

The Convener: I believe that you were supposed to be there for only a year, but you could not find your way out because you were unable to read the signs. *[Laughter.]*

As there are no more questions, we thank Dean Lockhart for his attendance. The committee will consider whether to approve the application for recognition of the proposed cross-party group, and we will inform you of our decision thereafter.

Dean Lockhart: Thank you very much.

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is a decision on whether to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group on Japan. I invite comments from members.

Elaine Smith: I refer to my previous question. It would be good practice for cross-party groups to try to have office bearers from different parties. That might not be in the code of conduct, but perhaps we should try to encourage it. However, I do not have an objection to the cross-party group being formed.

Gil Paterson: I know that we are here to look at the mechanisms—and I think that this is quite a technical aspect that we are engaging with—but that said, I think that this cross-party group would be of benefit to Scotland and the United Kingdom. I am quite surprised that we do not have such a group, as it could give rise to great opportunities in all sorts of areas, including the arts, commerce and industry. I very much support the group because, through its work, it would bring something back.

Tom Mason: I fully support the proposal. My only concern is the number of cross-party groups that we are generating. We seem to be approving a group every time we meet, and it is getting to the point that MSPs are getting thin on the ground. We should look at the issue in the not-too-distant future.

The Convener: That is a reasonable comment.

Maureen Watt: First, I apologise again for being late.

I am very supportive of this group being set up. We had one before; I do not know whether this has already been pointed out, but it was very much the baby of the late Alex Johnstone MSP. It was a shame that it fell into abeyance, and I think that its resurrection and re-formation would be a testament to Mr Johnstone, as he very much drove the previous group.

The Convener: That is a very good point to put on the record.

I think that three things arise from those comments. First, no one appears to be against the establishment of a cross-party group on Japan. Secondly, on the make-up of the group, I think that that is something that we could look further at—not in this instance, but in general. Finally, as Tom Mason has just pointed out—he and others have pointed this out before—according the group recognition will take us up to about 106 cross-party groups, which is a lot. We will need to address and discuss the issue at a future meeting. Does that seem reasonable, Tom?

Tom Mason: Perhaps the clerks can put together an Aunt Sally paper, setting out options for discussion.

The Convener: I have just been informed that the CPG annual report will be coming up soon, and it seems reasonable that we use that opportunity to discuss the issue.

Do members agree to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group on Japan?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: The cross-party group on Japan can be established. With that, we come to the end of the public part of the meeting.

09:43

Meeting continued in private until 10:47.

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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