



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Tuesday 22 June 2021

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
1st Meeting 2021, Session 6

CONVENER

*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP)

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

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

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Tuesday 22 June 2021

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:15]

Interests

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome everyone to the first meeting in session 6 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

As the oldest member of the committee present, I have the pleasure of convening the meeting for the first two items of business. I welcome all members to the committee and I look forward to working with them during this tenure. I remind all members present to switch their mobile phones to silent.

We have received apologies from Edward Mountain.

Under agenda item 1, I invite members to declare their interests. I will go first: I have no relevant interests to declare.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Likewise, I have no relevant interests to declare.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I have no relevant interests to declare.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I have no relevant interests to declare.

Convener

09:16

Alexander Stewart: Item 2 is to choose a convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish Labour Party are eligible for nomination as convener of this committee, and it is my understanding that Martin Whitfield is the party's nominee.

Martin Whitfield was chosen as convener.

Alexander Stewart: Congratulations, Martin.

The Convener (Martin Whitfield): I thank Alexander Stewart for opening the meeting and for bringing to the chair not just his age but his vast experience of committees in the past. I welcome all the members who are new to the Parliament, such as Paul McLennan and me, as well as those who have—shall we say?—a few more years of experience. We will look to them for guidance in the committee's work.

In my view, this is a very important and powerful committee, which has a huge responsibility to the Parliament and the people of Scotland. From the outset, I wish to put on public record my recognition of the lack of gender balance on the committee, which has occurred in the process of creating the membership of the committee rather than as the act or intention of any of its members. With the permission of members, I intend to write to the Parliamentary Bureau about that matter and raise it at the Conveners Group as a matter of urgency. The effect of the situation that we find ourselves in might directly affect aspects of the committee's responsibility, particularly with regard to standing orders rules 6.4.1(b) and (d). I have every confidence in each member of the committee, but I am concerned that, in fulfilling our responsibilities, we will not be able to carry the confidence of those whom we serve or who seek to rely on the committee. I hope that the members of the committee are in agreement with that action and I am happy to discuss it in more detail when we turn to our programme of work later.

Deputy Convener

09:19

The Convener: Item 3 is the choice of a deputy convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as deputy convener of this committee. I ask whether there are any nominations for the role. I understand that Paul McLennan might wish to say something.

Paul McLennan: Yes, convener. I nominate Bob Doris for the position of deputy convener.

Bob Doris was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: Congratulations, Bob. You certainly have committee experience dating all the way back to 2007, including in relation to local government and subordinate legislation. In fact, I think that you have experience of virtually all committees but, most importantly from my point of view, you were a member of the predecessor of this committee, so I will be looking to you for advice, wisdom and support. Congratulations.

Bob Doris: Thank you.

The Convener: Do you want to say anything?

Bob Doris: I would not normally say something at this point but, given the resonance of your initial comments as convener, it would be remiss of me not to reflect on them. We should of course strive for gender balance on all committees, but that is particularly the case with this committee, given the types of issues that we will consider proactively, I hope, and, frankly, as a matter of course. I support your initial comments. The lack of gender balance is deeply unfortunate but, irrespective of that, I look forward to working collegiately with all committee members to ensure that we seek the views of MSPs more widely—they are far more reflective of Scotland than the members of the committee might be in practice at the moment—and the views of wider society.

The Convener: Absolutely. I agree with those points.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:21

The Convener: Item 4 is to decide whether to take item 7 in private. Just to give a short explanation, a number of items will come before the committee that it would be better to take in private so that full and frank discussion can take place. There is no intention to avoid transparency in our decisions or in our opinions or views; it is just to allow full discussion to take place. In the current meeting, item 7 is about our programme for work. Do members have any comments before I invite us to take that item in private?

As no one wishes to speak, do members agree to take that item in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-Party Groups

09:22

The Convener: Item 5 is on cross-party groups. The issue has come up because of the timing of committees starting and the desire among members and groups outwith the Parliament to start cross-party groups. We have been asked to consider the rules on the membership and registration of cross-party groups. As I said, that requires our attention because of the timescale.

The committee is invited to consider and agree a general modification to rule 6.8 of the code of conduct to allow cross-party groups that have at least one MSP member from the majority of parties that are represented on the Parliamentary Bureau. That is not a rule change; it is an indication of how we would apply our ability to waive certain parts and regulations. In this case, we are carrying on with the process that I understand began with the previous committee. Because of the change of the structure of the parties on the Parliamentary Bureau, we would like to give an indication to CPGs that we will continue to allow them to be registered where they have at least one MSP member from the majority of parties on the bureau. Would anyone like to comment on that?

As there are no comments, do members agree to that general modification?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I like committees that move this fast.

Legacy Paper

09:24

The Convener: Item 6 is the legacy paper that was prepared by the previous committee to show the work that it covered and to indicate the areas that it felt we should look at. I would like to get the committee's permission to write to the session 5 committee members to thank them, particularly the convener, for their work and for the legacy paper, which encompasses a huge amount of work and raises a number of significant questions that we will look at. Do I have the committee's agreement to do that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We move to a discussion about the legacy paper. I see that Alexander Stewart would like to comment on it.

Alexander Stewart: I echo many of your comments about the legacy paper. The committee is vital in ensuring that we are seen by those in the Parliament and by the general public in Scotland to be performing our roles and responsibilities. I had the opportunity to be a member of the previous committee, and I very much concur with the approach that is suggested in the legacy paper. It mentions specific areas that might require to be revisited for further development.

For example, it is vital that we get the scrutiny and governance right for members' work outside Parliament. Tackling sexual harassment has been very high on the agenda both inside and outside the Parliament, and that will have to be looked at. Lobbying will also have to be looked at. We need to take a firm stance on those three areas. As we progress as a committee, we will need to make developments in those areas to ensure that we have the confidence of the Parliament, communities and Scotland as a whole. I look forward to going through the legacy paper with members, finalising our priorities for the committee's first year and then progressing those.

Bob Doris: I concur with what Alexander Stewart has said. I draw members' attention to two aspects of the legacy paper. The first is sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour. It is clear and explicit in the legacy paper that the Parliament should never be complacent in dealing with such matters. We are urged to keep them under constant review, as we, of course, should.

We should be mindful of the comments that we made at the start of the meeting about the committee's membership not being particularly reflective of Parliament as a whole. That does not mean that we cannot do our job, but it should not

have to be this way. I want to put that on the record.

The legacy paper also mentions involving people in our work. Just because we are a small committee and it might seem that we are dealing with the nuts and bolts and the mundane aspects of the Parliament—they might be a bit dry, but they are vital—does not mean that we should not reach out and involve various stakeholders and individuals in our work. Of course, we should, and I see that the previous committee did that, so I thank it for putting that on the record.

Finally—I know that I said that I would talk about two aspects—there is the section on the Parliament's practices and procedures. It is a real strength that we have new members on the committee, because I have been a member of the Scottish Parliament since 2007. The Parliament has been engaged in parliamentary reform in recent years, and some of that is bedding in, but it is very good to have a fresh set of eyes on the workings of Parliament. I call on fellow committee members who are new to the Parliament to work constructively and to look at the workings of the parliamentary process with a degree of scrutiny, because it is important to have a fresh look at such issues when we have new members coming in. We can get set in our ways if we are not careful.

I look forward to working collegiately in taking forward many of the issues that are raised in the legacy paper.

Paul McLennan: I concur with the comments that have been made. Involving people in our work is important. We need to reach out to as many people as possible and ensure that we listen to all parts of society. We have not mentioned the Scottish election, but it was mentioned in the legacy paper. We all went into the election thinking that turnout might drop, but the opposite happened, so it would be good to understand the reasons behind that. We should obviously try to encourage as big a turnout as possible in future elections. A bit of work and investigation into that would be very helpful so that the trend of increased turnout can, I hope, continue.

I concur with what has been said. I am looking forward to working with the rest of the committee.

The Convener: I absolutely agree with all the statements that have been made. I envisage that the committee will work collegiately across what some people call political boundaries but what I prefer to call the political spectrum. We have a good balance of new members and experienced members. To echo what Bob Doris said, I think that we are a group of people who genuinely want to involve other people in our work. We do not have the answers sitting in the committee, so

people who feel that they have answers to problems relating to procedures and other matters can come to us and will get a listening ear.

Before I close the public part of the meeting, I thank every member of the committee and the clerks who support us behind the scenes. I look forward to meeting in September, and I wish everyone a lovely recess.

09:31

Meeting continued in private until 10:11.

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.

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

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