



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 24 November 2022

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
22nd Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP)

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

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 24 November 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Martin Whitfield): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 22nd meeting in 2022 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. Our first agenda item is a decision on whether to take in private item 4, which is consideration of a draft report on the proxy voting scheme. Do we agree to take that in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-Party Group

The Convener: For our second agenda item, we welcome Liam Kerr MSP and his Movember moustache. Liam is the proposed deputy convener of a proposed cross-party group on ice sports. Please will you give the committee a flavour of the CPG's intentions?

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Yes, convener. Good morning to the committee. It is a real pleasure to join you to present the proposal for the cross-party group on ice sports. As the convener pointed out, I am the proposed deputy convener of the group. Unfortunately, my colleague David Torrance, the proposed convener, is unable to attend the meeting and sends his apologies.

The underlying reason for creating the CPG is that, as I am sure you know, ice sports in Scotland have seen considerable growth in participation and viewing numbers in recent years. Sports such as ice hockey, curling and ice skating are making an ever-increasing contribution to the aims that we have set out in the CPG registration form, including with regard to cohering communities, improving individual health and fitness levels—supporting the active Scotland delivery plan—and contributing to local economies.

As you might also have seen, it is a very exciting time for Scottish ice sports. By way of example, members will have seen the recent success in curling and will know about the women's team winning medals at the Olympics, as well as gold, silver and bronze medals at the world championships. The 2022 Olympic silver medal for curling went to the United Kingdom's men's team. Scottish ice hockey teams made the Elite Ice Hockey League play-offs last year. At this point, I will give a quick shout out to Aberdeen Lynx in my region, which regularly attracts more than 1,000 spectators to the arena at the beach. There have also been continued success and medals in ice skating, including for Lewis Gibson and Lilah Fear.

However, there can be no doubt that these sports face significant challenges, including, for example, the cost of energy. Members will know that that is having an awful impact on so many areas, but it has a significant impact on the cost of running ice rinks and ice arenas. Local authorities, which principally—although not exclusively—own these facilities, have their own significant and ever-increasing funding challenges, which leaves them having to make difficult funding decisions about opening facilities and about accessibility to communities with regard to both cost and the physical facilities. The implications of our collective and—let us be under no illusions—absolutely critical drive towards net zero will provide challenges for these facilities. Finally, there is the

cost to the clubs, leagues, officers and coaches of the equipment, and the operating costs, including the cost of ensuring that facilities are inclusive and accessible.

All those factors—the positives and the challenges—are set out in the purposes of the cross-party group in the registration form. That public good and those challenges make it clear that it is in the public interest that this CPG comes into being.

We want to start the CPG to celebrate what Scotland has to offer when it comes to ice sports, to shine the spotlight on best practice in the different sports, to promote and highlight the impact of clubs and groups on the health and wellbeing of our communities and society, and to highlight the challenges, while bringing groups together to seek, agree and promote solutions. When I say “we”, I mean the group. We have six official MSP members from three parties, so the Parliament’s criteria are more than satisfied. We have had expressions of interest from many other MSPs, who, perhaps due to other CPG commitments, have not yet been able to sign up as members. We anticipate that further interest will be stimulated following our decision to shift the CPG’s focus from only ice hockey to ice sports more generally.

There has been significant interest in the CPG from sports bodies, clubs and other stakeholders. For example, the Dundee Stars, the Fife Flyers, the Glasgow Clan, Scottish Ice Hockey, the Elite Ice Hockey League, Ice Hockey UK, sportscotland, Scottish Curling and the Scottish Ice Rinks Association have all signed up. We also have interest from British Ice Skating, which we expect—or hope—to confirm as a member next week.

There are no other CPGs like this in Parliament, which is incredible when we think about the contributions that these sports have made, which I listed earlier. I therefore ask the committee to approve the CPG in order that the Parliament can promote, protect and celebrate ice sports. I am happy to take questions from members.

The Convener: That is very kind, Liam. Thank you for that introduction. I am reassured, because one of the things that leapt out of the original registration form was the very narrow focus on ice hockey. You have explained that it is now much broader and includes ice rink operators and owners—both local authority and private interests—and Scottish Curling.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): A lot of what Liam Kerr said was about built facilities and indoor arenas. When it got colder in winter, there used to be a lot of curling ponds dotted around Scotland, where a lot of young

children first learned and got experience on ice. Will the cross-party group look at the extent of curling ponds across Scotland, their availability and whether there is a way of preserving them? At the moment, there seems to be an idea that building over them is the way forward. I wonder whether you have a view on that.

Liam Kerr: I do have a view. That is a really good point. This is a CPG about ice sports. If we start from the position that curling ponds are about providing access to ice sports for some people—because facilities are not as extensively available as we might hope—and offer a way into those sports for people who otherwise would not have the opportunity, the CPG needs to inform itself about that and come to a view on it. If—as Edward Mountain rightly suggests—the conclusion is that curling ponds are a public good and offer public access, the CPG’s remit in promoting ice sports clearly suggests that that would lead to it promoting them.

Edward Mountain: There is an opportunity to protect what I believe is a public asset from being lost, which is happening in many communities, especially across the Highlands. I have saved that thought for you.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Mr Kerr for his very passionate presentation about ice sport. He identified that there are really good reasons to celebrate it but that there are huge challenges for the sector. Lots of local authorities have a sports council to support and promote individuals progressing through any of these sports, but the biggest challenge is in trying to find facilities that they can go to. As Liam Kerr identified, many local authorities may not be in a strong financial position. One of the biggest issues is that people sometimes have to travel vast distances to find a facility that they can use in order to train regularly. Have you had any correspondence or negotiations with sport councils about what they are considering to ensure that the ice sport sector is given the priority that it deserves across the country?

Liam Kerr: Yes. The question is a very good one because, as I said earlier, an awful lot of the facilities are owned either by local authorities—as Alexander Stewart knows well—or by arm’s-length external organisations. In the current challenging situation, local authorities and ALEOs are having to make very difficult decisions, which will have wide-ranging impacts.

To turn to the substantive question, the CPG has to inform itself at a very early stage, with input from the likes of sports bodies and local authorities, in order to understand those challenges clearly—are they purely about funding or about how the funds are allocated to and from local authorities, or is something going on more

widely? Only once we understand the challenges can we work with those bodies and others more widely in the Parliament to understand what the solutions might be.

I anticipate that the CPG will conduct that exercise very early on. The member is right to say that having the facilities is at the heart of what we are trying to achieve. This goes back to Edward Mountain's question; we will have the facilities only if we look at this in the round and ask whether we have enough facilities and whether they are suitably accessible in all respects. That is what the CPG needs to understand at a very early stage.

It is a fantastic question.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): Good morning, Liam, and thanks for a great presentation.

I used to work in outdoor education for a charity, and part of that work was around skiing and snowboarding. We used to start by taking young people to the dry slopes, such as at Braehead or Edinburgh, and we progressed them on a developmental scale. The problem that the charity had was that, with the impact of the climate emergency, the snow levels had often changed considerably on the Ben Nevis range and in Aviemore and so on, which had a huge impact on the development of snow sports. Would the CPG consider that issue—I know that you cannot tackle it as a CPG, but how could you progress it?

I am also keen to see snow sports become part of curriculum for excellence, because there are so many positive outcomes from them.

Liam Kerr: That is right. The member would agree that the positive outcomes cut across all aspects—health, community and so on—so I strongly associate myself with that point.

Collette Stevenson is right to bring up the climate change agenda, which is the reason for my having mentioned the challenges of net zero. We face a climate emergency and its impacts; I hope to bring to the CPG my knowledge base from my committee commitments in the Parliament around that subject. There is an exercise to be done by the CPG—which will add wider value to parliamentary discussions—about the impacts of the climate emergency on the facilities that the member describes.

We need to wind the net zero idea into the discussion, because all the facilities—ski facilities or indoor arenas—face the same challenges of the drive to net zero. As a CPG, and as a Parliament, we have to understand how those will impact on our ability to put in place the facilities that, as we have established earlier, we desperately want to see throughout Scotland.

09:45

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I have a particular interest in this cross-party group—that does not always happen when members come here to seek approval for CPGs—because it makes me think about the most obvious ice sports club in Glasgow: the Glasgow Clan. I have not yet been able to go and see it, which is probably my loss. Ahead of today's meeting, I thought I would check what it is doing, and I saw that it has “kids for a quid” offers to encourage young people to watch the sport. Anyone who has visited Braehead cannot help but be enthused by the number of families who go to see ice hockey as a spectator sport. It is a really family-friendly occasion.

This proposal for a cross-party group has got me thinking about the link between spectator sports, entertainment and participation. I am wondering whether that is something that the group might consider, as we often talk about sporting pathways, and the first way to get young people involved is to get them watching a real spectacle, because they then want a go themselves.

I am conscious that the aims of the proposed cross-party group include debating the accessibility of existing infrastructure and promoting existing clubs. I would imagine that there are geographical inequalities in relation to some of the assets, so I wonder about the relationship between growing the spectator sport, the sporting pathways for participation and affordability. I do not expect to get answers on that from you, Mr Kerr, but I am interested in that connectivity, and the proposal has made me think about the situation in north Glasgow in particular. I know that lots of people I represent there go to watch Glasgow Clan, but I have never asked myself the question: what is the sporting pathway there for young people? Is that something that the cross-party group might investigate?

Liam Kerr: Yes, I think it is. It is absolutely the right tack to consider that and ask how we start that journey in communities that perhaps have not been involved in ice sports or, indeed, in any sport and how we bring them along and channel them through in order to get the wider benefits that I mentioned.

I encourage you to look at the Aberdeen Lynx website, for example—that is the one that I have most experience of. I used to watch Murrayfield Racers, 30-odd years ago, but I now watch Aberdeen Lynx. The Lynx seem to be getting more than 1,000 spectators at their home games already. Just as you say, it is such an exciting sport and there are all these people there watching, especially families. Ice hockey is perhaps a more family-friendly spectator

experience than other sports can sometimes be. There are all those families going along and watching a really exciting sport and, as you said, the younger people in particular will be thinking, "I fancy trying this." If you go on the Aberdeen Lynx website, you will find opportunities for them to do just that. That is not just for younger people; there are also opportunities for those of us who are not quite so young any more. There is an opportunity for someone to take their viewing experience and think, "This is a really exciting sport, and I want to get involved in it"—and they might then go on to participate. That opportunity is huge.

I have actually played ice hockey, up in Aberdeen, and I can assure you that I was appalling at it and I shall not be doing it again, but I still had that experience when I saw something and thought, "That looks great fun," and I had the opportunity to try it. I think that is so important, just as the member points out.

The Convener: Thank you, Bob, for your question. That has solved the question of your Christmas present from me: tickets are coming your way.

There is an existing CPG on sport, which covers a much broader range of sports and addresses many areas similar to those that you intend to cover. Have you had discussions with that CPG about your proposals, or is that something that, if recognition were granted, you would undertake to do, just to see whether there is any joint research that you could do, to avoid duplication?

Liam Kerr: We have not had that discussion yet, but we have done some research. Your point is exactly right: there is indeed a CPG on sport. Its members will thank me for saying that its annual general meeting is later today—I think—if any members of the committee are interested in going along. We were careful to work out what that group's remit is, to ensure that there was not a cannibalisation crossover, if that makes sense. We worked out that the CPG on sport has a much broader remit, just as you say, convener, and it is not specifically focused on ice sports—by definition, the good work that it is doing is much less focused on ice sports.

We think that there is, absolutely, an opportunity to have a laser focus on ice sports, rather than the broader scope of the sports CPG, particularly because of the issues that Collette Stevenson rightly brought up. We think that the groups are distinct but—as you say, convener—complementary, and we will certainly look to work closely with that group.

The Convener: That is helpful. Thank you for attending the meeting. Under our next agenda item, we will consider whether to give recognition to the proposed group, and the clerks will be in

touch with you in due course. Good luck with your moustache for the rest of Movember. I understand that people can find your giving page via your Facebook page.

Liam Kerr: Indeed.

The Convener: There is the advert for a good cause. Thank you for joining us, Liam.

Liam Kerr: I am very grateful.

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is on approval of the proposed CPG. Do members have any questions or comments that they would like to ponder before I formally put the proposal to the committee?

Edward Mountain: I make the observation that I make about every proposed group, before I say whether I think it is right or wrong. A large number of cross-party groups exist and MSPs are giving a great deal of commitment to them. I always raise the concern that another cross-party group—however worthwhile—will further strain the system. I think that we should be careful. That is my only comment.

The Convener: That is a very valid comment and one that it is right to make. That is why the committee intends to look at CPGs after the forthcoming recess. A lot of proposed CPGs come before us. I do not think that I am speaking out of turn when I say that I had some concerns about this application but found much reassurance in what the proposed deputy convener of the CPG said about its scope and breadth and about the need for it.

One important element of the transparency of this place is that it is accessible to groups that might otherwise feel that they cannot get to their MSP or get to the Parliament through their MSP.

Your point is well made and is noted.

Edward Mountain: I am content. I am never going to vote against a cross-party group application, because I do not think it is for me to choose, but I raised the concern because there are more cross-party groups than there are MSPs. They suck in a huge amount of time. That is just a caution.

The Convener: That point is well made.

Does anyone have any other comments?

As they do not, I formally propose that we grant recognition to the CPG. Is that agreed?

Members: *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We are in agreement. That concludes our public business.

09:52

Meeting continued in private until 10:48.

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