

# **FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 7 May 2002  
*(Morning)*

Session 1

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## FINANCE COMMITTEE 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2002, Session 1

### CONVENER

\*Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

\*Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con)

\*Mr Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab)

\*Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

\*attended

### THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Professor Arthur Midwinter (Adviser)

### ACTING CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

David McGill

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Terry Shevlin

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Gerald McNally

### LOCATION

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament

### Finance Committee

*Tuesday 7 May 2002*

*(Morning)*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:30*]

### Cross-cutting Reviews

**The Convener (Des McNulty):** Welcome to the Finance Committee's ninth meeting in 2002. We open the meeting in public. David Davidson has already switched off his mobile phone. We have received apologies from Mr Jamie Stone, and Professor Arthur Midwinter is in attendance.

Agenda item 1 concerns cross-cutting reviews and is an opportunity to brief the committee on the progress of the two reviews. All committee members were involved in discussions last week and progress continues on managing the work of the reviews. We now have provisional advisers for both reviews. The next stage is to set up as soon as possible a meeting between the advisers, the reporter groups and the consultees.

The clerk has produced a paper, which has been circulated. I would welcome any relevant comments from members on whether they are content with the paper. Do members wish to offer any suggestions about the preparatory work that can be carried out in advance of the next meetings?

**Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** We should accept the paper and move on.

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** I back that.

**The Convener:** Everybody is happy. Excellent.

### Item in Private

**The Convener:** Item 2 is to ask members to agree to consider in private the private finance initiative issues paper at the next meeting. Is that agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Budget Process 2003-04 (Committee Reports)

**The Convener:** Agenda item 3 relates to the budget process. The clerk has issued a paper that details the discussions that the committee had at its meeting on 13 November 2001 on whether consideration of subject committee budget reports should be in private.

At the time, the general feeling was that the Finance Committee should consider the reports in public if the subject committees agreed and were aware when they signed off their reports that that would happen. Members are asked to agree that the subject committee reports be made public. In so doing, members must be content that the recommendations that might be included in the subject committee reports will not have an adverse impact on the Finance Committee's report.

Do members have any views on whether the reports should be taken in private or in public?

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** We should discuss the reports in public. There is no strong reason why we should deal with them in private.

**Mr Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab):** We should discuss the reports in public, but we need to be careful not to upset other committees. That can sometimes be an easy mistake to make.

**Mr Davidson:** I agree. It is important that the committee examine how the subject committees have approached their meetings. I presume that, in future years, it will be up to us to give advice and take note of how the other committees approach the budget procedure. We will need to be fairly circumspect about how we state that. I recall that we had a discussion last year about the methodology that was used by the different subject committees. We held that discussion in private because that is not the same thing as examining the subject committees' actual reports. Perhaps we need to be aware that there are two parts to the matter.

**The Convener:** Obviously, there is a process of exchange between the Finance Committee and the subject committees. I suggest that we ask the clerk to tell the clerks of the subject committees that we expect to deal with their reports in public. If any subject committee has a problem with that, its clerk can inform us that there is an issue. We could make clear the basis of our expectation, and our clerk could liaise with the subject committees' clerks about the format that is to be followed.

**David McGill (Clerk):** At the moment, the subject committees' reports are published first by the Finance Committee as part of its report. As is

mentioned in the paper that has been circulated to members, one option is for the subject committees to put their reports on their pages on the Parliament's website. We could retain control by taking responsibility for asking the subject committees to do that, having first taken a quick look at the reports to ascertain whether they contain any issues that the Finance Committee would like to keep private. If they do not, we can then ask the subject committees to put their reports on their parts of the website. That would put the reports in the public domain, so there would be no issue about whether we could consider them in public.

**The Convener:** That seems to be a reasonable suggestion. Does Arthur Midwinter have any views on the matter?

**Professor Arthur Midwinter (Adviser):** I do not really mind either way, as long as we have a free and open discussion. I have a minor nagging concern, which reflects my experience over recent weeks. Fairly minor disagreements about procedures or about whether committees have followed guidance could be blown up in the public domain and portrayed as something like a turf war. There could be quite legitimate disagreement about whether guidance was appropriate for given committees. That is my only reservation.

**The Convener:** That is why I suggested that our clerks liaise with those of the subject committees in an attempt to identify issues. If concerns arise from the content of a subject committee's report, we can deal with that report in that context, with the clerks managing the process in the way that David McGill suggested. Do we agree in principle that that is how we will proceed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Item 4 is discussion of a paper that relates to our private finance initiative/public-private partnership inquiry, which we decided previously to discuss in private. I think that the member of the press has already left.

10:36

*Meeting continued in private until 10:56.*

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