

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 11 January 2005

Session 2

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FINANCE COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)

*Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

*Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

*John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Morris Fraser (Scottish Executive Finance and Central Services Department)

Tavish Scott (Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Susan Duffy

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Terry Shevlin

ASSISTANT CLERK

Emma Berry

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Finance Committee

Tuesday 11 January 2005

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:04*]

Items in Private

The Convener (Des McNulty): I welcome Tavish Scott, the Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform. I also welcome David Robb, who is head of the Executive's public bodies unit, and Morris Fraser, who is also from the public bodies unit. They are with us for item 2 on the agenda. We have another item to deal with first, so we will come to them in a minute.

I welcome the press and public to today's meeting and I wish everybody a happy new year. I remind people to turn pagers and mobile phones off. There are no apologies; all the committee's members are here.

Item 1 on the agenda is to consider whether to discuss agenda item 4 in private. As we will be talking about potential expenses for an individual, I think that it would be appropriate to discuss the matter in private. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I also propose that we consider our draft report on the financial memorandum for the Transport (Scotland) Bill in private at our next meeting. Are members agreeable to that?

Members indicated agreement.

Relocation of Public Sector Jobs

10:05

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is on relocation of public sector jobs. A few months ago, following publication of the committee's report in June, the committee agreed that it would like to monitor the Executive's progress on its relocation policy. The committee asked for, and the Executive agreed to provide, updates every six months, the first of which is in front of us today.

I formally welcome Tavish Scott and his colleagues. As members will see from the agenda, Leslie Evans was also due to attend, but is unfortunately not available today.

Before I invite the minister to make an opening statement, I say that we have made substantial progress on the issue. That is reflected in the papers that the minister has put before us today. It is very much in the spirit of co-operation and with the intention of pushing the shared agenda a bit further that I invite the minister to make an opening statement.

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott): Thank you very much. I wish one and all a happy new year. I agree with the sentiments that the convener has expressed in his opening remarks. I support the way in which the committee conducted its inquiry into public sector jobs relocation and the very positive way in which I believe that the Executive and the committee have together pushed the issue forward.

I will make a few remarks about the detail. I recognise and welcome the committee's stress on ensuring that Parliament's commissions are included within a wider relocation policy. That is an important development.

The timing of the discussion will allow the Executive to take account of the committee's further comments or endorsement before it implements the proposals that I will lay out today. We plan to begin the next round of relocation reviews in April. That will give us sufficient time to carry out the necessary full preparations for the next round of relocation reviews; work is on-going on the current round of reviews.

The committee will be aware of the announcement yesterday of another relocation under the small units initiative, to Tain. I was pleased to visit Dingwall and to see the Crown Office operation there. The unit there was first piloted last year and the extension of the pilot into a full establishment was confirmed by the First Minister at the convention of the Highlands and Islands in Thurso in October, if I remember rightly.

I stress, from the perspective of efficient government, that the unit in Dingwall is not only cheaper in terms of running costs than a similar unit in the central belt, but that early indications also suggest—the Crown Office is also keen to stress this point—that the relocation is more productive for that unit and for future units, such as the proposed unit that I announced for Tain yesterday. It is hoped that staff retention and, therefore, the retention of key skills will be significantly increased. That is exactly the sort of relocation that we want, which will continue to bring benefits to fragile communities and allow organisations to realise efficiency savings. I suggest that that is efficient government in action.

In September, in response to the committee's report, the Executive undertook eight specific tasks, on which you have asked for an update. We have provided a short paper on those undertakings. I understand that members have probably not had much time to consider the paper, so I will summarise a number of the main issues in it and will be happy to try to answer members' questions. The committee will probably wish to consider the paper and the attached guidance in detail. Of course, we are open to responding in correspondence to any questions with which we cannot deal today.

The Executive undertook to publish revised guidance on relocation; that has been done. The guidance makes it clear that a central support team—a very strong recommendation of the committee—will now undertake relocation reviews. That will ensure consistency of process and that there is transparency at all stages of a review. The team will now work more closely with local authorities and enterprise companies; it will work with organisations all the way through the process to ensure consistency of evaluation, which will allow information on costs and impacts to be provided more quickly in the future. The next round of reviews will begin in April, so stakeholders including the Finance Committee have time to suggest improvements to the guidance. We intend to publish the final guidance more widely. The Executive also undertook to publish reasons for decisions, which will be done as part of our drive for transparency. We will publish the reasons on the Executive website.

The Executive undertook to set out clearer standards for staff consultation and engagement in relocation, which has also been done. The revised guidance includes a section on staff engagement, which sets out staff issues that must be considered in a relocation review. The guidance emphasises the need to include staff representation on project teams and sets out a template for best practice in staff surveys. The Executive is in continuing dialogue with the unions on development of a protocol to ensure that non-

civil service staff can benefit from the type of framework that is already in place for Executive staff through the council of Scottish Executive unions.

The Executive undertook to consider how application of appraisal criteria should be made more consistent; that has also been done. We have made it clearer in the revised guidance that the fact that a central support team will undertake each location review will ensure that the criteria are applied consistently in the future.

The Executive undertook to continue its evaluation of the impact of relocation. That is happening and the revised guidance sets out how financial and economic evaluation should be carried out. We are already considering how best to carry out regular and consistent socioeconomic benefit evaluations in the future, when the improvements that I am describing have been implemented.

We also undertook to provide information on costs associated with relocation. We have done that and have identified costs for all bodies that have completed relocations. As bodies complete their relocations we will, on the proposed six-monthly basis, provide the committee with updates. Costs have been calculated on the basis of net change in expenditure, which I recall was agreed in earlier discussions with the committee, if not in correspondence. That information is being gathered in a comparative format for the first time and demonstrates that in almost all cases so far the savings in on-going running costs have quickly outweighed set-up costs following relocation. We are obviously keen to monitor the situation, given our wider commitments to making government more efficient through savings.

The Executive undertook to continue efforts in London to ensure that Scotland benefits from United Kingdom relocations that flow from the Lyons review. Those efforts are being taken forward. The Executive has a dedicated team in Scottish Development International, which monitors developments and discusses options with UK departments. We will continue efforts to bring benefits to Scotland, but it is important to note that redundancies that are being considered by UK departments under the Gershon review will be significant in Scotland. Departments that are considering relocating jobs to Scotland by 2010 will also be considering more immediate redundancies here and it is likely that redundancies will outweigh inward relocation. There is no point in disguising our concerns in that regard. We will monitor developments and—of course—report regularly to the committee.

Finally, the Executive undertook to come back to the committee with firmed-up ideas for developing our approach to relocation, which will emerge from

the wider policy context. That will also be done. Given the need to take account of developments in mapping out implementation of the efficient government plan—in particular in the context of the extension of best value throughout the public sector—we propose a two-stage approach. First, we will make implementation of the relocation policy more strategic through increased consistency and transparency and through involving more closely local authorities, enterprise networks and other agencies in order, for example, to take account of other publicly funded initiatives.

Secondly, we will link implementation of relocation with wider considerations such as efficient government. We have begun to map out the strategic linkages between those policies. Location will clearly be an aspect of efficiency—as the Crown Office example illustrates—and of effectiveness, whether through effective asset management, through effective location closer to stakeholders and customers or through core location efficiency savings. On a more practical level, it will not be possible to make linkages between implementation of the policies until more work has been done, in particular on the detail of the efficient government plan. That is very much an issue that we will take forward in our first six-monthly report to the committee.

That concludes my opening remarks. I am happy to answer questions.

The Convener: Thank you. I commend the Executive's short paper entitled "The Relocation Guide", which sets out clearly the direction of travel on relocation of public sector jobs. The committee is not in a position to provide a fully fledged response at this stage, so we will question the minister and officials on some of the details of the paper. I suggest that the committee should find a mechanism for bringing back a paper—perhaps in early February—which could feed into the consideration process. We will try to ensure that we provide a submission that covers points of detail.

10:15

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I am delighted by how the Executive has responded. I was one of the reporters for the committee's inquiry into relocation of public sector jobs, so I am particularly pleased to see how the committee's suggestions have been taken on board by the Executive. It is, however, disappointing that the Scottish media are far more interested in with whom people go on holiday than in how committees can work with the Executive to influence policy and make changes. I doubt that there will be much media interest in the subject that we are discussing. However, that will not

detract from the pleasure that I feel on reading through the guidance that the Executive has supplied. The document is particularly clear and helpful; I do not know who was responsible for putting it together, but it is impressive.

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It was Morris Fraser.

Dr Murray: Many of the concerns that were expressed to reporters at an early stage came from the unions, particularly those which were involved with the Scottish Natural Heritage relocation. Has there been discussion with trade unions about aspects of the guidance that relate to staff? The committee considered the issue of staff who cannot relocate or who are being made redundant, particularly in the context of Ireland, where there was a desire to help such people transfer to vacancies not just in the civil service but elsewhere in the public sector. Has consideration been given to transfer of staff to posts elsewhere in the public sector or even beyond it? The mechanisms in Ireland are a little different from those in Scotland.

Morris Fraser (Scottish Executive Finance and Central Services Department): Thank you for saying that the guidance is clear; that is very welcome.

The unions saw an early version of the guidance, but we thought that it was important that the committee see the guidance first and have a chance to comment on it. We are in continuing dialogue with the unions about redundancies. The unions are obviously concerned that relocation might lead to compulsory redundancies in some situations. The Scottish Executive unions are working in a network with the unions that represent staff in other Government departments in Scotland to try to mitigate redundancies that come about through the UK efficient government process or through relocations in Scotland, but that work is at an early stage. Dialogue is certainly going on.

Dr Murray: I was pleased to see that the document sets out on page 20 how the calculations will be made in relation to the criteria. Will you say a little more about the thought process behind the weightings for each indicator? For example, I assume that under "population density"—which appears under the heading, "Supporting fragile communities"—you would consider sparsity of population. However, if you were considering a large-scale relocation to an urban area, I assume that the population density of the area would not detract from the calculation. Also, I presume that the indicator, "employment by the public sector", relates to lack of employment by the public sector. How would the indicators be used in practice? It might be useful if they were applied to a theoretical case, to see how the calculation would work out in practice.

Morris Fraser: This is perhaps the first time that the criteria have been laid out in such a way, but the organisations that are currently under review have been using the system for the past year, so we can provide examples of how the calculations stack up. Indeed we have a table of the 32 local authorities' up-to-date figures on all the criteria, which we can provide to the committee. We propose a similar register or table at local authority or even more local level, perhaps for 80 or 90 towns and cities in Scotland. The register will be publicly available, so that anyone can see at any time how the situation would stack up for their town or city. The process will be much more open.

Tavish Scott: Simply because of the diversity of Scotland, I have been keen to deal with such matters at sub-local government level. I think that that is workable and we will continue to do work in that regard.

Mr Brocklebank: I, too, am glad that many of our suggestions have been taken up and that you are working towards taking on board even more of them. Of course, I am pleased about the good fortune of Tain in Easter Ross, which you mentioned. I am sure that Tain is totally deserving and that the fact that the jobs are going there has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that the minister's colleague, Jamie Stone, represents Tain in the Scottish Parliament.

We have talked previously about the fact that ultimately, decisions about relocations were perhaps political. I notice that the guidance says that

"At the end of the first stage, approval is sought for the shortlist, which Ministers may wish to amend".

That sounds as if, ultimately, the decisions will be political.

Tavish Scott: Funnily enough, when preparing for this meeting this morning, I wrote down Ted Brocklebank's name and then wrote "political" next to it. As usual, he did not disappoint; I always know where Mr Brocklebank is coming from. However, in his question, Mr Brocklebank did not mention the fact that, time and again—once again this morning—we have stated that there is a requirement on us to be as transparent as possible about the process. The suggestion that we can make political decisions, as Mr Brocklebank always likes to suggest, without context or caveats, is not the case. The decisions will be laid out transparently and will be based on the criteria that Elaine Murray has just described. Any relocation decision will be subject to internal scrutiny and the scrutiny of the Scottish Parliament. That has been the case previously and the process that we are putting in place will ensure that it happens in an even more robust fashion than at present.

Mr Brocklebank: You accept, of course, that there appear to be problems about relocation of Scottish Natural Heritage to Inverness. Indeed, I think that you conceded that, although you were not party to that decision, there were questions about it. Would it have been helpful to have avoided placing in the document a line such as:

"At the end of the first stage, approval is sought for the shortlist, which Ministers may wish to amend"?

Why would ministers wish to amend the shortlist if the process is as transparent as we are told it is?

Tavish Scott: I thought that, in a democracy, ministers had the right to make decisions based on advice given by officials. I seem to remember that a former Tory Prime Minister said:

"Advisers advise and Ministers decide"—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 26 October 1989; Vol 158, c 1044.].

I hold to that principle fairly strongly. Perhaps Mr Brocklebank would do likewise if he were ever to hold office, which is a fairly unlikely scenario.

We will make decisions properly. We will do so in the way that I have described, using the robust and transparent mechanisms that are in place. Since Mr Brocklebank mentioned it, I will say that although I was not a minister at the time, the decision to relocate SNH to Inverness was right. It was the right approach to take in relation to that body at that time.

I repeat: we have responded positively to the committee's recommendations and I hope that we can take the process forward with the agreement of the committee.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Have you any plans to continue to monitor the Irish national spatial strategy? The Irish were open with us about what they were doing when we visited Ireland to find out what was happening in that regard.

Are you looking to trigger the same dynamic with councils and economic development agencies as you have triggered with the UK Government? To put it another way, are you trying to ensure that the proposition to relocate is put as positively as possible in an attempt to trigger a dynamic that results in a pull rather than a push?

Tavish Scott: That is a fair question. We will keep an eye on what is happening in Ireland. We have always been open to examining what is happening in other parts of Europe and further afield. Elaine Murray's report on Ireland was helpful in terms of our gaining an understanding of the context there. We have always made it clear that there are differences between Scotland and Ireland in respect of relocations; nevertheless, the exercise was helpful.

It will not give anything away if I say that we are planning to hold a seminar at the end of February with representatives from local government and local enterprise companies so that we can deal with exactly the point that Jim Mather raised and of which we are extremely aware.

Jim Mather: On the small units initiative, the trigger for the process is in the gift of senior management. The document includes the caveat that such decisions need not be driven purely by costs and efficiency savings. On the evidence from Dingwall and, I suspect, many other areas, there are cost savings to be made. Will you consider a volunteer-driven approach that might further emulate the Irish situation and create a production line of cost-saving small-scale moves?

Tavish Scott: I am sympathetic to that argument. I think that such an arrangement is inherent in the principles of efficient government and would be one of the ways in which improvements, savings and productivity gains could be illustrated. Although Mr Mather is correct in his appraisal of the role of the management group, I assure him that there is a great deal of ministerial drive behind the principle of the voluntary approach that he talked about and behind greater roll-out of the small units initiative, in which the examples that we have seen so far achieve the objectives that we all share.

Jim Mather: Paragraph 2.3 of "The Relocation Guide" says:

"Ministers have established a fund to assist with initial start-up and accommodation costs".

How much is in that fund?

Morris Fraser: The fund is £500,000 a year for this year and next year.

Jim Mather: How many jobs is it anticipated would relocate under the umbrella of that £500,000?

Morris Fraser: The cost per job will vary significantly in each case. However, we imagine that the amount would cover between 40 and 80 jobs a year. However, the number could be significantly higher, depending on the location.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): For many areas in Scotland, the small units initiative is the only one that will bear fruit, because those areas do not have the capacity to absorb bigger units. However, it is not clear to me how the initiative will be driven forward. You imply that there is general willingness among ministers to do that, but do you have, for instance, a target for how many jobs over a period should be dispersed as a result of the small units initiative? How will you know whether you have done well, or not?

Tavish Scott: I do not mean to demean or to diminish the question, but I am wary of setting a target. If we were to set a target for jobs, we would end up scrabbling around the system trying to create positions to ensure that the target was met.

Morris Fraser can keep me right on the dates, but I know that in the first stage of the process we asked the management groups to consider carefully what natural groupings of officials in their departments could be located in the sort of areas we are talking about. Such relocations could deliver efficiency savings in cost terms—for example, in relation to overnight accommodation—and productivity gains. The management groups came up with an initial list and we will keep that process going and keep a little weight behind it so that, in the context of efficient government, management groups are required constantly to consider whether any elements of their departments could be located in different locations while remaining at the core of their departments.

Alasdair Morgan: I know that you have to be sensitive about the feelings of staff, but is there any intention of making that list public?

Tavish Scott: The list of locations is available, but because of the sensitivities that you mention, we have not said that, for example, we intend to relocate a certain number of people from a certain department, or what groups of people have been identified in that regard. This is a people issue; other members have mentioned staff unions, which would have legitimate concerns if we were to make such a list public.

Alasdair Morgan: I think that I heard you say that you are keen to go below the local authority level in an attempt to gather indicators. Did I pick that up correctly?

Tavish Scott: Yes.

Alasdair Morgan: It strikes me that the indicators are such that the same places will always be at the top of the list. Quite a few small units could be moved out and the same place would still be at the top of the list, while other deserving places would be further down the list. It is a question of how we ensure that the jam is spread evenly throughout Scotland. If the indicators were broken down, that would avoid the danger that one place would always be at the top of the list, but it would also produce a huge list of potential locations. I suspect that members of the committee could each provide the minister with a dozen potential locations. How can you attempt to satisfy all those requirements?

10:30

Tavish Scott: I would hate to be accused by Mr Brocklebank of being political about the matter, but Mr Morgan has put his finger on the dilemma that

we have about a statistical breakdown. There are two parts to our work. As well as producing a statistical breakdown, we will continue to ask—as we have done in the past—local authorities and local enterprise companies to give us their thoughts and their guidance on the areas within their areas that meet the overall criteria and, as it were, the sub-criteria. We will do more of that at the seminar in February. In relation to Mr Morgan's area—the south of Scotland—we have been keen to ask the councils and the enterprise companies to think about where they would like such units to be located. They have already done that.

The Convener: I presume that the new criteria will not necessarily produce the same clustering effect that is evident in Stirling, Dunfermline and West Lothian, where relocations have tended to be concentrated. I presume that there will be a thinning-out process. Will you consider the subject retrospectively, and factor into the equation, relocations that have taken place in the past 10 years, or will you take a fresh look every time a relocation is proposed?

Tavish Scott: I do not think that we can avoid considering where we have located bodies. We will also have to pay regard to decisions that are taken in London. In my opening remarks, I mentioned linkages with other areas of policy; it is incumbent on us to take an overview. Ministers must have an overview of relocation because the system does not always throw that up, which answers a question that has been asked. Ultimately, we have ministers so that we can balance competing arguments and external pressures.

The Convener: I am sure that you will tell us that there is considerable buy-in from your colleagues throughout the Executive to your approach, but sometimes that needs to translate into practical changes in policy memoranda or regulations, or into instructions to departments or non-departmental public bodies. An issue that came up in our inquiry was that property availability for relocations appeared to be a key criterion. Market failure had meant that there were some areas, especially in the west of Scotland, where property did not appear to be available, with the result that those areas were in the catch-22 situation of not being eligible for relocations because a key part of the matrix could not be filled in.

Will you speak to the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning to ensure that, where there is evidence of market failure, the enterprise companies are not prevented from working with the private sector to make accommodation available, either by building it or by acquiring it? That would allow relocations to happen and would mean that lack of property was not an insuperable barrier.

Tavish Scott: That is a fair point, and much work has been done on it. The analysis that you gave has been tested and there have been discussions on the mechanisms that we could use to deal with such situations. The seminar that we will hold at the end of February will deal with that matter, too. We must look through the eyes of the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning at the whole of the enterprise network; in other words, as well as engage with local enterprise companies, we must go to the top and work with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise at senior level. We are well aware of the point that the convener made and we will pursue it and ensure that we provide an update on progress in the six-monthly briefings.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): What will you do to prevent complacency from creeping into your overall plan? What targets will you set in the next few years to ensure that you can say that you have achieved more relocation than has been achieved in the past? Are you happy with the pace at which progress is being made at the moment?

Tavish Scott: Mr Swinburne will acknowledge that we must always be sensitive about relocations because of staff concerns. Although it would be nice to be able to make a sweeping statement about what we were going to do with regard to the relocation of a range of bodies, we must recognise the responsibility that we have for the people who work for us, whether directly or in NDPBs.

Mr Swinburne will know that, once a year, we publish a list of the organisations that are entering the process. We will do that again in April. At that point, the committee and the Parliament will see which bodies might be subject to relocation. As Mr Swinburne has been on the committee since the start of the present session of Parliament, he will also know that bodies enter that process as a result of a series of triggers. How the process rolls out is reasonably well defined. That is a logical way in which to progress matters. We want to minimise uncertainty and disruption to individual members of staff and their personal circumstances and we do not want to affect the abilities or the productivity of an organisation or a department that works on behalf of the citizens of Scotland. There are a number of important qualifications but, fundamentally, the list is published once a year and we have no plans to change the process. We will keep the committee up to date on that.

John Swinburne: Are you quite happy with the progress that has been made to date or do you feel that you need to do much better?

Tavish Scott: I would always say that the process could be more efficient and more effective and could be conducted more quickly. I suspect that we are all frustrated that such matters take a

long time. I would like the process to be sharper and more effective. David Robb, Morris Fraser and the team that will drive the process from the centre will be a strong part of that focus. If I am honest, I must admit that that focus has been missing for the past two years. I now feel much more confident about the process that we will go through and I hope that the six-monthly reviews and updates that we will give to the committee will demonstrate that not just what I want to happen, but what the committee would like to happen, is taking place.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston)

(Lab): You say that the relocation process will be speeded up, but do you have any assumptions about how long it should take?

Tavish Scott: I have no such assumptions because, as Mr McAveety knows, the process involves numerous hurdles that have to be overcome. I simply add to the point that I made to John Swinburne, which was that having a central team will change things. The committee knows that, in the past, organisations and departments could use external consultants in the process. I am not saying that that was necessarily wrong, but there is no doubt that the involvement of such outside organisations could slow the process and did not ensure the consistency that we and the committee want to achieve. I hope that the timeline will improve as a result of the central team that will deal with the process.

Mr McAveety: Do you have any idea when the announcement on the headquarters of sportscotland will be made?

The Convener: Perhaps that is what the minister meant by hurdles.

Tavish Scott: I have no idea; I am loth to use the word "soon", because I know that it can be misinterpreted. We will do our best to ensure that the announcement is made in as short a time as possible.

Jim Mather: I am keen to build on what the Executive has produced for us and to give the process a bit more momentum. I was disappointed in the annex on additional relocation costs, but I trust that the minister will find that my criticism is positive.

It is one thing to show the start-up costs and the running costs, but to do only that sells the process short. There is a case for adding three additional columns. There could be a column that examined the intangible gains that are internal to the departmental process and which emanate from relocation, such as higher productivity, better retention rates and lower recruitment and training costs. A fourth column could describe external intangible gains, such as the relocation's impact on the local economy, the support that it would

provide for the local infrastructure and the justification that it would offer for existing local infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals. Finally, a fifth column could detail the employee gains, which are probably more tangible than intangible because they relate to things such as quality of life, work-life balance and the job satisfaction that accrues from that. I think that we need to expand the table from its present quite thin and limited form.

Tavish Scott: I am very taken with those suggestions, which we will certainly consider; I have no difficulty with having a close look at them. Perhaps we can consider how we have been able to respond to them when we come back to the committee in six months' time. I am always slightly nervous—dare I say it—about listing intangible benefits simply because, in different avenues and in different areas, Government has been criticised for measuring things that are perhaps, in measurement terms, a bit of a leap of faith. We can give some thought to how we can best measure the examples that Mr Mather has given today. In broad terms, I am happy to look at Mr Mather's suggestion.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I echo other members in welcoming the minister's note and the relocation guide. I also endorse Jim Mather's point. From the information that I have seen, the relocation of the Scottish Public Pensions Agency to Galashiels has greatly improved the agency's staff turnover figure and productivity and has had a beneficial impact on the community. From the work that the local enterprise company has done, it would be useful to capture that information and to use it nationally as a basis for comparison. It is not inevitable that an agency will work better because it has been relocated, but that is what has happened de facto in Galashiels. Constant vigilance is important.

The drive for efficient government is mentioned in both the minister's note and the relocation guide. Did any financial assumptions on relocation policy contribute to the cash savings that have been anticipated from the efficient government review?

Tavish Scott: The short answer is no.

Jeremy Purvis: On the separate issue of the dispersal of UK Government jobs, I was interested to see that the minister's note says that UK Government departments lack a strategic approach. In his discussions with the Treasury and other UK Government departments on the implementation of the Gershon review, will the minister ensure that those departments are fully aware of the Executive's relocation guide and the improvements that the Executive is making? Perhaps they can learn about better information

and timely contact with their own staff. Will that be part of the minister's discussions?

Tavish Scott: It would be unfair to claim—and I did not do so—that the UK Government has no strategic approach, given that it has a top-line figure of, I think, some 80,000 posts. However, the issue for us is how that impacts on Scotland. The precise answer to Mr Purvis's questions is that, through Scottish Development International and through the work of our relocation policy team and other officials within our department, we plan to keep in close touch with those developments so that we can make some assessment. My understanding is that UK departments with staff in Scotland are only now getting to the position of assessing what that top-line target that was set by the UK Government in the summer will mean for individual departments. What impact that will have for staff in Scotland will come out of that process only as it continues.

Jeremy Purvis: I appreciate that. The minister's note states:

"It has not been easy to engage with UK Departments, as they have not adopted a clear or consistent process for considering relocation options."

That jars slightly, given all the warm words that one has read from the Treasury on the Gershon review.

However, my point is that people from around Scotland who have seen Scottish Executive jobs being relocated to their community now face the prospect of having the reverse happen if existing jobs in other UK departments are cut. Neither my constituents nor anyone else will make the distinction between the two levels of Government. My area faces the prospect that Department for Work and Pensions jobs in Galashiels might go. After the successful relocation of the SPPA, my constituents would see that as nonsense.

How far will the minister go in his discussions with UK departments on their relocation options, given that we have an evidence base that can show that the cash savings that are sought from a reduction in staff numbers could be achieved by having a different process? Given the top-line figures that the minister mentioned, is it his assumption or belief that the issue is a fait accompli?

10:45

Tavish Scott: Obviously, we will do our best to influence the UK Government's relocation process. On that side of the equation, we can suggest the course of action that we are taking and illustrate how we have worked with the parliamentary committee to achieve it. From Scottish Development International's description to me of the relocation process in London, I

understand that there is currently no consistency across UK departments on how relocation should be taken forward. Ultimately, that is a matter for them. All that we can do is to invite them to note the mechanism that we follow because we are very worried about consistency.

On the other side of the equation, it is important that—at the risk of repeating myself—we keep as close as possible to developments in London on UK Government department jobs, whether those jobs be in Galashiels or any other part of Scotland. I accept absolutely the point that the citizen out there—whether he be an employee of DWP or of the shop that supplies sandwiches to DWP—would see it as at best curious were Scottish Executive jobs to be relocated to a community and the reverse to happen with UK Government jobs. In the round, the citizen just sees Government. We are very aware of that issue. Frankly, it is on-going work, on which there will need to be a lot of activity over the next few months.

Jeremy Purvis: The minister will be aware that, in evidence to us on the budget, the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform said that there were too many quangos in Scotland. When I asked whether he had a hit list, he said no. Nevertheless, it would appear that Tom McCabe thinks that there are too many quangos while Tavish Scott is mapping out the future and the locations of many of those quangos. It is slightly alarming that the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform does not have a strategy, but it would be a bit odd if Tavish Scott were to propose the relocation of an organisation that Tom McCabe had in mind to cut.

Tavish Scott: It is difficult for me to second-guess the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform. I guess that my principal responsibilities here are for relocation. Let me put it this way. If the Government as a whole decided that a public body should no longer exist or must change fundamentally, my job would be to ensure that we had the ducks in a row and that there was not an inconsistent decision to relocate a body that was simultaneously to be abolished, as that would not be efficient government. That is all that I can say on that.

The Convener: Let me recast Jeremy Purvis's question. In the context of the efficient government drive, it has been suggested that non-departmental public bodies—or supported public bodies in whatever guise—should bring together key backroom functions, such as administration, personnel management and payroll. Most organisations would do that by drawing in those functions from different agencies and locating them in a central unit. However, there might be a perceived tendency for that to cut against relocation policy. How will the Executive deal with the tension between those two policy intents?

Tavish Scott: That is a fair observation. However, if we take, for example, the personnel departments of public sector bodies within the Highlands and Islands—which is an area of Scotland that I know a little about—I do not believe that we should assume that all the personnel staff should naturally be located in Inverness. Given modern information technology such as broadband, there is no reason why that function could not be located in Lochinver—if I may pluck that hypothetical example from off the top of my head. The same principle probably applies to any area of Scotland. For example, in the south of Scotland, if the council, health board and local agencies in Dumfries and Galloway were to combine their personnel functions—which would seem to make eminent sense in efficient government terms—that function would not necessarily be located in the main town.

Thought will need to be given to how and where such functions should be placed. That is one point that will be considered at the seminar in February. The whole issue will need to be given consideration as the efficient government process continues.

The Convener: I suppose, however, that like everything else in government, the question of who does it determines whether it happens. When Highlands and Islands Enterprise appeared before the committee to talk about economic growth, it highlighted that it was interested in bringing together different backroom functions of different agencies that serve the Highlands and Islands. It is less easy to see how that would work in central or southern Scotland. Has thought been given to involving not just local enterprise companies but Scottish Enterprise and Executive departments in seeking out opportunities, in relation not just to efficient government activities and bringing together back-office functions but to the relocation strategy? You could get a double bang by thinking about the issue in more strategic terms.

Tavish Scott: I accept that, which is why I set out the two-stage process. Your point is embedded in the second stage. We need to be aware of the opportunities.

Mr Brocklebank: The minister will be glad to know that my next question is not political, but concerns accountancy. You still believe that the decision to move Scottish Natural Heritage to Inverness was the right one on balance. Can you bring us up to date with the additional costs of that move? The costs were originally supposed to be £12 million, but they went up to £23 million. One trade union has even stated that the gross figure will be something like £45 million. Can you tell us what the actual cost will be?

Tavish Scott: No, not today, as I have said numerous times. With respect, I do not think that

Mr Brocklebank was listening to what I said. We can produce the final costs for relocations once the final relocations have taken place. We will be happy to furnish the committee with our most up-to-date figures through our colleagues in the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department, which is the sponsoring department, but we cannot give a final figure at this stage.

Mr Brocklebank: Can you confirm the story in *The Scotsman* on 21 December, which stated that SNH

“will pay more than £1 million a year in rent for its new headquarters”

when the agency could buy it outright for £13 million?

Tavish Scott: That story is wrong. SNH is looking at rent options, lease options and outright purchase options. The story is factually incorrect.

The Convener: That is another story from *The Scotsman* that cannot be confirmed.

Dr Murray: I want to ask about the trigger for relocation—which you helpfully describe in your guidance—the definition of which seems to be broader than it was previously. One of the major differences with the Irish attitude was that nobody was exempt from consideration for relocation. When the tourism, culture and sport brief was brought together, the tourism section relocated from Glasgow to Edinburgh but, under the relocation policy, departments in Victoria Quay might never be considered for relocation. Do you intend to examine departments that do not trigger the relocation policy, and to consider partial or complete relocation of departments that are located in Executive-owned properties in Edinburgh?

Tavish Scott: That is a fair question. The example I give in response is the Enterprise Department—the Government made a conscious decision to move that entire department to Glasgow. The same could apply again. Elaine Murray is right that there is no policy to suddenly move all of Victoria Quay. However, there is a constant drive, as we discussed a moment ago, to examine discrete parts of departments and to determine how they could fit in to the small units initiative. The logic of that is that as the work continues, departments are examining the most efficient delivery of their services. I suggest that were a complete department to move, that would be a decision of Government, taken on the same basis as the decision on the relocation of the Enterprise Department to Glasgow some years ago.

Dr Murray: One of the counterbalancing arguments against the relocation of small units to rural areas has been the high cost of information

technology in certain locations. Would that be much of a factor, given the Executive's emphasis on rolling out broadband throughout Scotland and the additional funding that has been provided?

Tavish Scott: I would hope not, and I hope that that cost would steadily diminish. One of the arguments for Tain, for example, was that the IT links that the Crown Office needs in order to electronically send transcribed police tapes are there, and meet the office's standards. I agree with Elaine Murray's premise that the Executive's investment in IT should ensure that no area of Scotland will be disadvantaged by its location, which is the desire of the country. Heck, I represent one such area, so I feel strongly about it.

Dr Murray: When is the seminar in February?

Tavish Scott: We do not have a definitive date yet.

Alasdair Morgan: I will follow up on the IT point, with which I very much agree. Annex B of your guidance states that

"factors that have come to light in previous relocations include"

high IT costs. Who claimed that the additional IT costs would have been high?

Tavish Scott: We might have to come back to you on that in writing. There was a case in which we had significant difficulties with IT, but I am sorry that I cannot answer the question today. We will get back to you.

Alasdair Morgan: My second point is on reduced staff turnover after some relocations, presumably as a result of increased staff satisfaction. Although it is early days, are there plans to examine turnover following relocations, with a view to using the figures in future publicity? We have a big problem in some rural areas, not with job relocation but with attracting people such as doctors, dentists, teachers and social workers—particularly the younger ones—who for some reason think that they will miss out on something if they come out to the sticks and move away from the fleshpots. It might be a good idea to have some countervailing success stories to sell to those people.

Tavish Scott: I agree. That is related to Jim Mather's suggestion for three additional columns in the analysis table. Perhaps we could add Alasdair Morgan's suggestion, and come up with a way of dealing with the issue.

The Convener: Alasdair Morgan could publish a guide to the fleshpots of Galloway.

Jeremy Purvis: I have two quick questions, but first it was interesting to note that Mr Morgan's good friend Christine Grahame attacked the

relocation of the Scottish Public Pensions Agency to Galashiels, and said that the jobs were not real jobs. It is incumbent on politicians to recognise good things when they happen.

Alasdair Morgan: I hope that that was not a party-political point.

Jeremy Purvis: Absolutely not. It was a non-party-political point.

The clerks provided information that there are 253 senior civil service staff in the top pay bands in the Scottish Executive. Have any of those staff been relocated? I would hate to think that senior civil servants in Scotland did not want to move outside Edinburgh.

Tavish Scott: Some have been relocated—they are in Glasgow. I do not know whether the head of the SPPA is among those 253. We would need to come back on that one.

Jeremy Purvis: If the aim is to change the culture and the underlying principles of the civil service, the relocation policy has to apply to the entire civil service, not just to administrative and clerical staff. Information on that would be useful.

The guidance states that a lot of weight is given to the change in population, especially with relocations of 30 or fewer staff. The indicator that you provide is a decline in population, but that is not necessarily an indicator of a fragile community. A more accurate indicator of a local economy is the change in the labour force. For example, my community is the only area where the population has increased, but the population is elderly and the labour force is declining, which has a greater impact on the local economy and its future than census data imply. Similar situations might apply in other parts of the south of Scotland and the Highlands. Using more sophisticated labour market information, rather than census data, would provide a better indicator, especially when the aim is to support fragile communities.

11:00

Tavish Scott: I take that point—you illustrate, as other members have done this morning, the difficulties with a broad-brush, top-line approach to such analysis and that is why we are determined to push it down. Again, that is the advantage of having a central unit: we can not only drive the process but ensure that we achieve a consistency of statistical approach, which is, after all, one of the main planks that you have been pushing on us.

The Convener: One of the points that I made in our debate on relocation in September is that it appears that a disproportionate part of the growth of the civil service since 1997 has been in Edinburgh. I understand your reluctance to set

targets for relocation to specific areas, but is it not possible to set a target for balancing, or rebalancing, growth so that more of Scotland shares in it? Surely it is easier to set and manage a target that says that we will, in general, move jobs away from Edinburgh than a target that says that we will move jobs to area X or area Y.

Tavish Scott: As you know, we have a presumption against Edinburgh, which is not without its controversies, not least in Edinburgh. Having gone through the process, I am not particularly keen to open it all up again. You ask a big strategic question of Government. We have been through an intensive process of seeking to ensure that our system is better and that the factors that we have discussed at some length are included in it. I am more than happy to discuss the top-line approach with colleagues but I could not possibly give a commitment today to change our overall approach. You suggest a fundamentally different approach, which strikes me more as the Irish approach, given the interesting report that the committee produced.

The Convener: I am not sure about that—the Irish approach is more about directing relocation. The Irish want to move jobs to specific types of area. I understand your reluctance to make such a commitment, bearing in mind the system that you have put in place, but one of the arguments is to do with the concentration of government in Edinburgh. It is clear from the statistical evidence that the biggest growth in civil service and public sector jobs since devolution has been in Edinburgh. There is surely a strategic consequence to what you say you are trying to do, in that you are trying to reduce that concentration to some degree.

I am not necessarily saying that you need to set a numerical target, but it appears that growth is taking place in Edinburgh rather than elsewhere in Scotland and I suggest that a commitment to shift the balance is the sine qua non of an effective relocation policy. It seems to me that the one thing that is missing is for you to take the final step and say that we cannot continue—inadvertently, if you like—to increase the concentration of jobs in Edinburgh. That is not to dictate how you deal with the practicalities of relocation policy, but simply to say that there is an overriding strategic need to reverse what appears to be an inexorable tendency.

Tavish Scott: Possibly the best way to respond to your point is to go back to the two-stage strategic approach that I described in the final part of my introductory remarks. The second stage perhaps does not precisely meet your objective, but it involves to some extent the interaction of different elements of Government policy with relocation. Other external pressures have to be

factored in, not least what is happening in London at the moment and how that might impact on Scotland during 2005 or 2006. On the London jobs issue, the transactional departments that act in Scotland do not exist in Edinburgh, on the whole, so there would be implications there. We have to factor in those issues and consider the matter in the round. I cannot honestly give a very clear answer on that today, but we will consider the matter in the context of the strategic approach that we will take.

The Convener: It is important to say that the matter needs to be considered in the round, because the two levels of Government have significant implications for the policy. As you say, the apparent concentration of civil service jobs could be accentuated. There is also a sense that relocation away from Edinburgh might in itself address or feed into other policy objectives: for example, one way to remove congestion in Edinburgh is to have fewer people travelling into the city.

I pick up on another issue: transferability, which was dealt with in paragraphs 111 to 117 of our report. I do not think that you have given us a clear reply on that. We might want to take it up with John Elvidge when he appears before us, but I give you the opportunity to respond.

Tavish Scott: I think that taking up that issue with John Elvidge is the answer. Issues that are related to staff management come into that area. I understand that John Elvidge will come along to the committee later in January to deal with many issues, no doubt, but specifically to deal with that one.

John Swinburne: Are you happy with the co-operation that you are receiving from the Westminster Government on the transfer of jobs from the south-east to Scotland? If not, what can you do to put pressure on Westminster? Such transfers would be the most positive form of relocation as far as Scotland is concerned.

Tavish Scott: We touched on that earlier, but I am comfortable with the access that Scottish Development International, which is, in effect, our agent in that regard, has to Whitehall departments. They are in close touch and have weekly contact at the right level, which is important. As and when appropriate, I will ask ministerial colleagues who have direct contact with those departments to engage with them.

I accept that relocations to Scotland would be attractive, but I gently suggest that that process has to be weighed in the balance of what happens following the Gershon review in London in relation to the changes and job losses that have been announced already at the top line—the 80,000 jobs—and what that might mean for Scotland. I do not want to build up expectations that lots of civil

service jobs will suddenly come here, without recognising that there might be job losses as well.

The Convener: On your response on transferability, John Elvidge is responsible for civil service issues but he cannot talk about, for example, the transferability of NDPB staff into the civil service or vice versa. You might want to take up the issue at your February conference. I would like to return to it at the next part of the six-monthly process, although obviously we can pursue it with John Elvidge.

Another issue is the implications of best value for the relocation policy, which you mention in paragraph 19 of your update paper. Can you say any more about that? It is mentioned as something that will be taken forward.

Tavish Scott: Morris Fraser will deal with that.

Morris Fraser: The duty of best value has recently been imposed on the wider public sector, which means that not only the boards but the chief executives of public bodies are bound to do nothing that is inefficient. I am not suggesting that they did not do that before, but they now have that publicly visible duty.

In judging whether a relocation decision or proposal is efficient, we must be clear about what efficient means. In short, the costs table shows that some organisations will realise savings on a yearly basis, but they might have quite high initial costs. Therefore, it might take a good number of years for them to be seen to be efficient. We must tease out questions such as the implications for best value, the definition of efficiency and the number of years in which savings will have to be realised before an organisation is seen to be efficient.

The Convener: It sounds like the issue requires a bit of fleshing out.

Jim Mather: Being efficient may well mean doing as well as or better than organisations in other jurisdictions. We have heard that £500,000 will be spent and perhaps 40 jobs will be relocated with the small units initiative. Clearly, that will be benchmarked against what happens in Ireland, whose relocation policy covers matters that, in Scotland, are reserved as well as those that are devolved. The aspiration was 10,300 jobs, but the figure was around the 4,000 mark when I last looked, and I suspect that the cost per job was materially different. What level of discomfort do you have with such benchmarking? What other things do you need to do to close the gap?

Morris Fraser: The £500,000 is, of course, an initial start-up cost, which is normally the big hit, especially for small units. The cost per job of moving 10 people is significantly higher than that for moving 100 people, but we should realise that an annual saving will come back into that

£500,000. Therefore, that cost is not in itself the cost per job.

Jim Mather: I am well aware of that. However, the stark numbers relating to the transfer and the subsequent move will be in the public domain. I suggest that that will be a real incentive to our starting to consider, for example, the volunteer proposition that exists in Ireland. I will certainly keep a close eye on that matter.

Tavish Scott: Those things will be in the public domain. On the other hand, the overall approach will be based on a net change of expenditure, as we have agreed with the convener and the committee. We can always compare—or not, as the case may be—like with like, but you have asked us to ensure that, in agreement with the committee, we produce a table that shows a net change in expenditure figure, which we have been keen to do. We are happy to go away and consider the three or four ideas that will add to that by way of comparative analysis. I respectfully suggest that things need to be taken in the round. We can always pull figures here and there, but we will have the main figure and we will then consider the additional tables.

The Convener: We can be your best value reviewers.

Jeremy Purvis: The minister said that financial assumptions would not be counted towards the efficient government review. However, consistency of approach is important. Morris Fraser outlined a similar aspect. If the efficient government review talks about the relocation of backroom operations, which may mean relocation within a particular area, there will be start-up costs and training costs, but considerable savings could be realised in the long term and there would be consistency. I do not know whether there have been discussions with Audit Scotland, but we certainly heard that, in connection with the efficient government review, the realised savings will be externally audited. A consistent approach would be welcome, considering that a similar process is under way. I cannot see any reason why such savings, which would be savings to the public purse, cannot be captured as efficiency savings as long as the auditor's requirements are satisfied.

Tavish Scott: Nor can I. However, the point is that the figures are auditable. The last thing that I would want to do is suggest that we will try to push the figures under in order to push up the overall efficient government savings without the Finance Committee or Audit Scotland being aware of that. We will make that clear.

The Convener: At the start, I think that we said we would go through the document reasonably seriously and try to put in a submission. It might be helpful to have a technical briefing on issues such

as weightings, which it is probably not appropriate to deal with in full committee. Would you be prepared to deal with that issue in that way?

Tavish Scott: Yes.

The Convener: On behalf of the committee, I thank you and your colleagues for coming along, and I express the hope that we are making progress. We hope to see evidence of that in perhaps six months or so, when we have a subsequent update.

Tavish Scott: Thank you.

Civil Service Effectiveness

11:15

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is consideration of a paper from the clerk and a briefing paper from the Scottish Parliament information centre on the civil service, prior to our taking evidence that will allow us to feed into Public Administration Select Committee's inquiry into civil service effectiveness. As members will recall, we discussed the committee's remit, and the paper from the clerk seeks to clarify those issues and suggests a way in which the committee could take them forward. In order to make headway on the issues that we are interested in, I think that we should proceed in the way suggested in the paper. After we have taken evidence from John Elvidge, the permanent secretary, on 25 January, we could, if members wish, have a further discussion on any other evidence that we might wish to seek. I ask Susan Duffy to say something about the mechanisms for taking further evidence.

Susan Duffy (Clerk): On 25 January, we are due to put a paper to the committee on the committee's future work programme until the summer. One of the issues that the committee had already signalled that it wanted to look at was efficient government, and the paper suggests that issues that may emerge from the evidence session with John Elvidge could be taken under the banner of efficient government. The paper that is produced on 25 January would seek to encompass possible dates and those slots can be filled in after the committee has taken evidence from John Elvidge.

The Convener: Are there any comments on the paper or any issues that members want to raise? Are members content with the route forward that has been mapped out?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That concludes that item. Our final item concerns witness expenses and will, as previously agreed, be taken in private.

11:17

Meeting continued in private until 11:26.

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