



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

**Thursday 14 December 2023**

**Session 6**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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**Thursday 14 December 2023**

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**STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE**  
**21<sup>st</sup> Meeting 2023, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

\*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)

\*Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP)

\*Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Catherine Fergusson

**LOCATION**

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)



## Scottish Parliament

### Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 14 December 2023

*[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 21st meeting in 2023 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. We have received no apologies this morning. The committee is complete.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take in private item 4, which is a continuation of our consideration of the committee's work programme. Do members agree to take item 4 in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Thank you very much.

## Cross-Party Group

09:30

**The Convener:** Our second agenda item is consideration of an application for recognition from a proposed cross-party group on the civil nuclear industry. I welcome to the meeting Oliver Mundell MSP, the proposed co-convener of the group, and invite him to make an opening statement about its purpose.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** Thank you, convener, and good morning to committee members. I should say up front that I am not an expert on nuclear science, but I am clear, as an MSP with a legacy nuclear site in my constituency, that such sites are significant and they have a continued social, economic and environmental impact, as do other aspects of the civil nuclear industry across Scotland.

I and a number of the other members who are interested in forming the group consider that the area does not currently get the scrutiny or interest at Holyrood that it merits. We recognise that there is no collective view across the Parliament on the future of nuclear policy. However, a large number of people are employed in the sector and there will continue to be a significant nuclear footprint in Scotland for decades to come.

We are trying to create a space in which the policy issues affecting communities and individuals whom we represent can be explored in more detail. Our intention is to focus initially on those aspects in which cross-party support exists—skills and skill shortages, the supply chain and the role for communities in shaping the future of existing nuclear sites. We are also particularly keen to explore and highlight decommissioning work. The decommissioning sector will be a major employer and will have a significant economic and environmental impact in Scotland.

I am happy to take any questions that the committee might have. I am hopeful that the group will work well and will be an opportunity to create the forum that we refer to in our purpose statement.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. We will try to avoid any deep scientific questions on the topic. Do members have any questions? If not, I will kick off on a couple of things on—sorry, did I cut across you, Ivan?

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** No, it was Evelyn who was trying to come in.

**The Convener:** My apologies, Evelyn. Please ask your question.

**Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** Thank you, convener.

Thanks for your introductory remarks, Oliver. I note your constituency interest in the issue. Obviously, the Scottish Government does not see a future for nuclear energy. Will your proposed CPG focus mainly on decommissioning? Will that be a huge part of its work?

**Oliver Mundell:** Decommissioning will be a huge part of its work—it will probably make up the majority of the work, because the majority of the sites in Scotland are at that stage. However, we did not want to exclude those working in the supply chain or those who continue to work at Torness or Hunterston from our considerations.

We are also keenly aware that there are opportunities for the supply chain in Scotland in relation to new nuclear power elsewhere in the United Kingdom. There is a UK-wide nuclear skills task force, and a lot of the skills that are involved in decommissioning and in the supply chain overlap with those in new nuclear power—it is essentially the same workforce. Again, we are keen to explore career pathways and opportunities for people living in Scotland.

There is also a research centre at the University of Strathclyde that carries out advanced nuclear research. I do not think that it is the Scottish Government's position that such things should not be happening in Scotland, as its position relates to the building of new nuclear power stations.

I will be up front about the fact that there are members of the proposed group who are passionately in favour of new nuclear power, but there are also members of it who do not support that. I make it quite clear that the group will not be campaigning for new nuclear sites; neither, however, will it be campaigning against such sites. We did not want to exclude people in the industry who are working in Scotland at the moment. We want to take the broadest look at the art of the possible with regard to capturing the cross-party support that is required to set up a cross-party group.

The vast majority of the activity in the nuclear sector in Scotland, both economically and in relation to the sheer number of workers, is in decommissioning. A lot of people do not understand that. They say that the Scottish Government is against new nuclear power stations, but there are thousands of people who will be working—today, tomorrow and into the future—on the sites in question, and it is important that the issues that affect them are discussed in Parliament. The fact that we disagree on future energy policy does not mean that we should not explore the challenges in the sector.

**Evelyn Tweed:** Thank you. That was a good, balanced answer on the way forward.

**The Convener:** I have a question. The application form provides for the names to be given of members of the proposed group from outside the Parliament. One of the purposes of a cross-party group is to allow experts to have access to MSPs so that MSPs can gain more knowledge of a subject. No non-MSP individuals are mentioned, and the only organisation that is mentioned is the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, which, I understand, will provide the secretariat support. Have you had any interest, or are you aware of any interest, from individuals or other organisations that might want to contribute to the CPG?

**Oliver Mundell:** I am aware of individuals who have wider interests. I sit on the Chapelcross site stakeholder group, and I regularly attend a range of nuclear-related events, such as the event that was held in Parliament just the other week, which a large number of people came to. Therefore, there is interest in engaging with the Parliament on the issue. There has been talk of having a CPG on the nuclear industry for pretty much the whole time that I have been an MSP, but, because of the political space in which we operate, it has been difficult to get that off the ground.

A number of people in the industry and a number of individuals are interested, but they are keen to see whether the group will be established before committing themselves. I have had conversations with people in the supply chain and a number of individuals who work in the sector. Given the range of MSPs who are involved and their geographical relationship with the sites, I am confident that those people will join the group. Along with the other co-convener and the deputy convener, I intend to write to anyone we think would be interested in joining, in an effort to make the membership of the group as broad as possible.

**The Convener:** That is helpful.

Ivan, did you want to comment?

**Ivan McKee:** No—you covered my point.

**The Convener:** The other question that I want to ask concerns the section of the form entitled "Financial Benefits or Other Benefits". An estimate of £2,000 is provided for the provision of secretariat support by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. Will you give an indication of how that was calculated? How did you come up with the figure?

**Oliver Mundell:** The form asks for an estimate. Obviously, we do not know what the cost will be in year 1. We spent some time looking at other

CPGs, for which quite a range of figures has been given.

The committee is looking at the role of CPGs. I do not wish to call other groups into question but, sometimes, it is quite difficult to see how the range of figures is produced. We were keen to provide an estimate at the higher end, to provide as much transparency as possible, but that figure is primarily intended to cover staff time in preparing for meetings and writing agendas and minutes.

As we discussed at our initial meeting, there is a hope that the group can engage more closely with some sites, companies and other things outwith Parliament, and there might be costs involved in facilitating that. It is not that MSPs would receive any of that £2,000 but that there might be incidental costs in facilitating the visits in terms of time and resource. Although it is a large figure on paper, it is not a large figure across 12 months for a group that plans to be active. It is a ballpark figure.

**The Convener:** The committee will be reassured that you have done some thinking about it because, as you say, we have been looking at CPGs in general, and we will be returning to that work in the new year.

**Oliver Mundell:** Some CPGs appear to have help from outside organisations with no costs involved. Our figure was to reflect the fact that people would be paid for hours of work to support the CPG.

**The Convener:** Yes. Rather than being a donation of £2,000 in cash, it will be for work in hand and staff time. That is helpful.

If there are no further questions, I thank you for your attendance this morning, Oliver. The committee will consider your application under our next agenda item, and the clerks will inform you of the committee's decision in due course.

**Oliver Mundell:** I appreciate that. Thank you.

**The Convener:** Agenda item 3 is the committee's consideration of whether to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group on the civil nuclear industry. Would anyone like to comment?

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Oliver Mundell clearly articulated why it is important that the interests of the sector and the people who work in it are represented and discussed in Parliament. On that basis, I am more than content that we give our approval.

**Ivan McKee:** Evelyn Tweed explored the issue of energy policy, which Oliver articulated very well in both the document and what he said this morning. The disagreement—the different views—on the future of nuclear energy is an important

factor in this consideration, but, from what we have heard, that aspect has been well considered. In order for the group to maintain cross-party support, the approach that was outlined would need to continue to be central to its ethos. On that basis, I am content to proceed.

**Evelyn Tweed:** I had a look at other cross-party groups to see whether a group already existed that could fill this space. I think that there is room to constitute the group, so I am happy to support it, given Oliver's comments.

**The Convener:** That is very helpful, because one of the things that we have noted during this parliamentary session is that a number of CPGs sit in similar areas. However, nothing covers this area at the moment.

**Stephen Kerr:** Provided that there is cross-party participation in a group, whether or not the group's focus is consistent with a party's or Government's policy is not really relevant. The relevant issue is that there is cross-party participation. For example, I might be involved in a number of cross-party groups that have positions or views that the current Government might not approve of. That would not be a reason for not having those groups.

**The Convener:** Yes, absolutely.

Annie, do you want to comment before I formally put the question?

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** For the reasons that everyone else has given, I am content. The group has cross-party support and Oliver articulated its purpose very well.

**The Convener:** That is excellent.

Are members agreed to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group on the civil nuclear industry?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** That is excellent. Thank you very much. I now move the meeting into private session.

09:44

*Meeting continued in private until 10:17.*



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