

JUSTICE 2 COMMITTEE

Tuesday 12 June 2001
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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JUSTICE 2 COMMITTEE

† 18th Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab)

*Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP)

*Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Gillian Baxendine

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Claire Menzies

ASSISTANT CLERK

Fiona Groves

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

† 17th Meeting 2001, Session 1—joint meeting with Justice 1 Committee.

Scottish Parliament

Justice 2 Committee

Tuesday 12 June 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:48*]

The Convener (Pauline McNeill): Now that we are more than quorate, I welcome members to this meeting of the Justice 2 Committee. We have a short agenda today. I should say that we have been busy this morning on a visit to the Crown Office. That was not a committee meeting as such, but it is why we are not meeting at our usual time. It is important to put on the record that we have been working for most of the day on justice matters, so the agenda is short.

There are two items that I wish to report to the committee. First, I have received correspondence from Liz Curran, who was a witness from Routes Out of Prostitution. She wishes to correct the oral evidence that she gave on 23 May, when she said in response to a question from me that women convicted of offences related to prostitution are placed on the sex offenders register. She has corrected that evidence and says that it is not the case that women charged with soliciting are placed on the sex offenders register.

Secondly, it was intended that Alasdair Morgan and I would meet representatives of the Prison Officers Association Scotland, as they were writing to us throughout the course of their dispute. Alasdair Morgan was unable to make the meeting because of stage 3 of the Convention Rights (Compliance) (Scotland) Bill. However, I popped in and out of the debate to meet the SPOA representatives. As it happened, on that day they had just reported on the final arbitration agreement. I have papers on the joint agreement that can be circulated if members wish to read them. It is an important stage in the process. I thought that members would like to know that we made the effort to meet the representatives, and that we have paperwork if members wish to read it. Are there any questions?

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): It would be helpful if the paperwork was circulated.

The Convener: There are two documents. One is the joint agreement, and the other is a paper from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. We will circulate them to members, who can take it from there.

Women's Offending

The Convener: Item 1 is women's offending. The main purpose of the item is to report on our visit to Cornton Vale prison. Members have copies of a comprehensive report that the clerks have prepared on the visits to different areas of the prison by two groups of members of the Justice 1 Committee and the Justice 2 Committee. Members may add to the report if they wish. You may wish to make general comments on how you felt about the visit, following which we must decide whether to end the matter there or to pursue one of the options in the note from the clerk. Do members have general comments on the visit, before we address the report?

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): Having seen Cornton Vale before Clive Fairweather's initial inspection, I think that the difference now is like night and day. I am sure that it was obvious to people who were seeing the prison for the first time that the difference between it now and what it was like in the past was enormous. There has been a tangible change. It has been improved vastly from the first time that I saw it.

Mrs Mulligan: The visit to Cornton Vale was my first visit to a prison and I was not sure what to expect. However, I recognise what Lyndsay McIntosh alluded to in that the prison has improved greatly from what one might have expected a few years ago. It was a humane place. However, I am concerned that it is not the most appropriate place for some of the women there. That view does not relate specifically to Cornton Vale, but at some stage we need to consider why women are sent to prison when that is not the most appropriate place for them to be sent. What options are available to women who get into difficulties with their lifestyle? Perhaps we could deal with such matters at a future date.

The Convener: My feelings are similar to those of Mary Mulligan. In evidence at a previous meeting, the Association of Visiting Committees for Scottish Penal Establishments said that someone has to decide whether we want a rehabilitation centre or a prison. The statistics that we were given showed that 90 per cent of women in prison have a drug addiction problem and 50 per cent are in prison for petty crime, so that comment rings true in respect of whether we wish prison to remain as it is. Cornton Vale has a huge job to undertake with women with a drug addiction problem. I have a particular suggestion to make, but I shall wait to hear what other members have to say first.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I apologise for being late.

The governor of Cornton Vale made the interesting comment that she never thought that the condition of the women could get any worse than when they came into prison, but it does. That is a serious matter and it must be addressed. We saw from the physical appearance of some of the women that they were in a bad state. Some were emaciated, very dependent on drugs and unstable. The governor made a devastating point.

Points about induction have been raised with us before. It is not the sexiest issue to do with prisons, but the induction procedure is taken very seriously at Cornton Vale. That is important. The view is being arrived at that all women are at risk. I have heard evidence elsewhere that cases of suicide were people who had not been thought to be at risk; the people who were considered at risk were protected. It is a terribly difficult thing to determine.

I am very impressed with the governor. She has had a huge amount to do with the ethos of the prison. I have visited other prisons and—to use Lyndsay McIntosh's phrase—comparing Cornton Vale with Barlinnie is like comparing night and day. I have a great deal of praise for the people who work there. However, according to the governor, the number of male staff is not suitable. I could see why. It is not the fault of the male staff, but sometimes the issues that the women raise are not ones that the male prison officers are comfortable answering. As well as all the other issues to do with women's prisons, we should perhaps consider having more women prison officers and not men who have been transferred from elsewhere.

The Convener: That is an important point. The reason why the number of male officers is high at the moment is that officers have been redeployed following the closure of three prisons. The position might settle a bit, but Christine Grahame's point is well made. We should perhaps include it in the report.

Even though we did not see the health centre prior to the changes, I think that we could all see the dramatic difference that the centre has made. Mary Mulligan asked why we send so many women to prison. We do not know the answer to that, but it struck me that sheriffs who make the decision to send women to prison may know about the facilities on offer. We heard that some of the pregnant women there were being attended to for the first time in their pregnancy. That is a serious problem.

The committee has to decide whether it wants to amend the report, take a closer look at a particular issue or expand the inquiry and take more evidence. There has already been an Executive announcement on consideration of the setting-up of halfway houses. Where there is space on the

agenda, I feel that we should investigate what such halfway houses involve. I am worried that any change to the current situation will affect the health centre. I would like assurances that any changes will not mean that we disband what has been a great achievement in the Scottish Prison Service.

We have in front of us a paper from the clerks. It gives three options: undertaking a wide-ranging inquiry over several months; identifying a smaller number of specific issues on which further work should be done; or identifying any specific issues. It is up to the committee, but I would like us to find the time to get more information on our options.

Christine Grahame: I have numbered the options 1, 2 and 3—in reverse order to that given in the paper. My first choice is identifying any specific issues where the Executive might be questioned on current policy—and then questioning them. Then we could move on to No 2—identifying a smaller number of specific issues on which further work should be done. We have to consider our work load. If we take things too broadly, we will dissipate our energies. It would therefore be useful to ask the Executive about specific things, get a response and then move on to investigate the issues and see whether some changes can be implemented in this parliamentary session. One would hope that that would be a step forward in the consideration of women's offending and in penal attitudes to women offenders.

Mrs McIntosh: My view is similar to Christine Grahame's. Although we may want to undertake a wide-ranging inquiry, it would have to concentrate on issues such as alternatives to custody. If, as Mary Mulligan suggested, we wish to consider why women are in jail and explore the alternatives, we must be sure that there is something in its place. Such an inquiry would take an enormous amount of time. Although I am happy to undertake such an inquiry, what we are already doing prevents us from doing so. For example, it will take about a year to complete our inquiry into the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, which we were working on this morning. Mary Mulligan's suggestion is worthy of a main issue inquiry. If we can undertake smaller tasks in between, that is fine, but I would not want to give that inquiry anything less than our full attention at an appropriate time.

15:00

The Convener: I have taken both those views on board. Christine Grahame's proposal was the third option from the clerk's paper, which is that of identifying specific issues about which the Executive might be questioned on current policy. We have not examined in any detail what the Executive has in mind for halfway houses. A

ministerial committee has been set up, but we do not know much about it. We could ask the minister to update us on that committee's work before we decide whether the imprisonment of women should be the focus of an inquiry. That might cover the third option.

Christine Grahame: A couple of other questions spring to mind. It would be useful at another meeting to ask why more women are being imprisoned when the target was to have fewer women in prison. It was a simple policy decision. Furthermore, the governor of Cornton Vale—a very experienced lady—reckoned that it is not the best way forward to have male prison officers working in female prisons. What will be done about that? Will prison closures have an impact on the situation? Will more men be transferred to work at Cornton Vale? We may be able to alter certain matters in two years. We may achieve a momentum when more changes are made in women's prisons without our having to undertake such matters through the committee. Let us start pushing matters forward.

The Convener: I am happy for members to pick up such proposals. We presently have under way issues concerning Cornton Vale women's prison and what the future might hold. We may examine the alternatives. As Lyndsay McIntosh said, an inquiry into women being sent to prison would be much more work, because we would have to consider all the evidence from community service schemes and so on. We shall have to rule out such an inquiry at the moment because of our work load.

Christine Grahame: Would not that come under the heading of why more women are being imprisoned? If the level of fines were raised and certain matters were no longer a criminal offence, women would be taken out of the criminal justice system. The Executive could undertake such a simple policy. Women are in prison for their failure to pay fairly small fines. We must also consider remand procedure. Why are more women in prison when the Executive's target was to reduce the number of women sent to prison? Why has that policy not worked? What will the Executive do about it? What policies will it introduce to change the situation, such as raising the fines level? I accept that that is an alternative to custody, but the Executive could deal with specific matters quite quickly.

Mrs McIntosh: At our visit to Cornton Vale, Mary Mulligan and I were advised of the number of people who were making good progress when they left prison, but who had been picked up on old warrants and were sent back to prison. Can not we get round that problem?

The Convener: I am happy to concentrate on any of the issues suggested by Mary Mulligan and

Christine Grahame. We just need to be clear about which road we want to go down. Do members consider it appropriate to ask the minister what the ministerial group is doing before we decide on the focus of our discussions?

Christine Grahame: In fairness to the minister, we should make a list of questions so that he knows our agenda.

That would lead us on to deciding whether we want to continue on specific issues. This is why I chose the order that I did with regard to further work to be done. If we are not satisfied with what the minister says, we may then wish to pursue the matter on behalf of the public, and say that the Executive will not in fact stop more women being in prison; that the committee wants to consider the measures to be taken to stop that happening; and that that was the Executive's target.

The Convener: I will summarise the issues that are on the list. One question is why we are imprisoning so many women. We know that the number of women prisoners is at an all-time high. There are issues to do with Cornton Vale itself, and we might wish to consider further the ratio of male officers to female officers.

Christine Grahame: Does the Executive consider it appropriate that the number of male prison officers is being increased, as opposed to what would be a better practice—to have more female officers? What are the reasons for that?

The Convener: We can examine that specific staffing issue.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): There is also the age profile of prisoners to consider.

The Convener: Just a minute—we can also consider the alternatives to custody and the announcement on halfway houses. We have four matters to consider.

Ms MacDonald: Sorry, convener. I noticed something about the age profile, on reading page 2 of the paper. I got an impression that a number of younger women are being imprisoned. There is an indication that there would be scope for alternatives to prison in relation to short sentences. Does the Executive have the information that will inform its decisions on alternatives to custodial sentences?

The Convener: So—we want to be asking questions about sentencing.

Ms MacDonald: I want to ask about the age profile and about average sentences.

The Convener: We will add to our list the age profile of women offenders and length of sentences. The point has been made that it is very difficult to do any kind of rehabilitation work when some sentences are so short. Christine Grahame

pointed out that the governor of Cornton Vale has indicated that each time she sees one of the large number of repeat offenders coming back to the prison, that person is in worse condition than when she left.

Can I ask that we—

Christine Grahame: I would like to make one last point, convener, which would follow the matter right through. What is the Executive's current policy on support for discharged prisoners? The evidence that we got from Turnaround and Routes Out of Prostitution is that the measures that they can provide are but a drop in the bucket. As the governor of Cornton Vale said, to deal with the situation there would need to be somebody meeting every woman who was discharged from prison. That is obviously not practical, but it appears that, once women are out, they just end up back in the general domestic situations and environments that catapulted them into prison or led to their being there in the first place. It is important, as Lyndsay McIntosh said, to break that revolving-door cycle.

The Convener: That is a good point. I think it was Margo MacDonald who asked the witnesses about what happens when Turnaround, for example, must service a much bigger population. It is a small organisation. It can provide a personal service, but can it do so for a bigger population?

Ms MacDonald: The witnesses said that it could not.

The Convener: That is right.

Shall we close the list at that?

Christine Grahame: Yes—that is fine.

The Convener: We will give advance notice to the ministerial team on the questions that we want to ask them. We will look for a slot for that—after the recess—and we will need to decide the committee's specific focus.

Do members feel that there is anything about the written report that has not so far been covered?

Mrs McIntosh: Considering the amount of information that we had to take in on the day, I think that the report is remarkably good.

Christine Grahame: I am sorry if I have missed this, but are my comments about the degenerating condition of the women as they come in, and about the fact that they cannot get any worse, included? The problem is outside and the prison must pick up the fallout. Some of the women are in a far worse state outside the prison and it is worth picking up on that. They are now tending to serve three or four years, and that is also worth noting.

The Convener: It would be useful to have a

"Women's Health" section, separate from the one on the health centre. That would pick up the evidence that was given to us about the deterioration of women's health, particularly the evidence about repeat offenders coming back into prison and their health being worse than when they left. It would also pick up on the evidence that the governor of Cornton Vale gave that many women were having medical attention for the first time, including pregnant women who had never attended any antenatal classes. That would give a general picture of the situation at Cornton Vale and a picture of the importance of the health centre.

Christine Grahame: Do we want to mention the woman who was not suitable for Cornton Vale? She was in a terrible state. She was described to us as being covered in body lice.

The Convener: That is in the report.

Christine Grahame: I am glad that that is in the report. It is a sad reflection of the facilities that are available to people who have fallen out of every loop that exists.

The Convener: The case is referred to on page 3, which states:

"The Head commented to the first group that a woman in her 40s had been sent to Cornton Vale the previous night, infected with body lice and an alcoholic, who should never have been sent back to prison by the court, as she required help, not imprisonment."

Christine Grahame: Is it fair to include in the report the words "but, however, sheriffs may have no option"—we may not wish to do so—and the comment that the convener made that putting the woman in Cornton Vale at least ensured that she would get immediate medical assistance? I ask for that to be included to ensure that blame is not laid on the sheriff for putting that woman into Cornton Vale. When faced with such a situation, how can a sheriff best deal with the person? The sheriff might have bent the rules, but it was in that woman's interest to have immediate medical attention. Perhaps we should put that in the report.

The Convener: I will put that point to the committee. I, too, wonder whether it is in the minds of sheriffs when passing sentence that, in sending a woman to prison, she might at least get the attention that she needs. Are members happy to include that in the report?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Between the two groups, we had quite a comprehensive look at Cornton Vale. The group that I was with—which went on Friday 25 May—did not see the laundry, but the second group was able to see it.

Mrs McIntosh: It was a big washing machine.

The Convener: Christine Grahame, Michael Matheson and I also managed to speak to quite a few prisoners. That gave us a useful perspective. Prisoners raised some issues, as they always do. It might be important to say in the report that we conversed with prisoners.

Mrs McIntosh: We went to one of the work areas where prisoners were packing tea and sugar. We had the opportunity to speak with prisoners there.

Mrs Mulligan: We also visited the crafts area.

Mrs McIntosh: That was great.

Mrs Mulligan: The crafts area is about offering skills to the women. We should include in the report something about the education that goes on—not school education, but education for life.

Mrs McIntosh: Working in the crafts area teaches the prisoners skills and gives them an interest.

Christine Grahame: I have other concerns about that. There were women there who are awaiting deportation and I wonder whether that is appropriate. Members may remember the table at which the women who were awaiting deportation sat. There was a different atmosphere—obviously—at that table from the atmosphere at the other tables. It is fair to say that the remand area, which had a table with deportees, was the most volatile area that we visited.

The Convener: I put that point to members.

Mrs Mulligan: Is that matter not being addressed? Is it not the case that those who are awaiting deportation will be accommodated elsewhere anyway?

Christine Grahame: They were to be deported. They were not awaiting finalisation.

Mrs Mulligan: Are they not being moved somewhere else anyway, out of the prison?

15:15

Ms MacDonald: I hope so.

Christine Grahame: That was not conveyed to us at the time.

The Convener: We should include in the report the fact that we knew that there were asylum seekers in prison. I was unaware of that until three weeks ago, when I dealt with a constituency case. Mary Mulligan might be right that there is provision for them already, but we should include that point in the report and seek clarification on it.

Christine Grahame: The fact that those women were mixed in with remand prisoners—

Ms MacDonald: Cannot we just demand that

folk should not be sent to Cornton Vale because they are economic refugees?

The Convener: We can make the point that the prison is unsuitable accommodation. If there is a response, that will be clarified.

Christine Grahame: I am sorry, convener. Can I take you back? Mary Mulligan raised the issue of a policy change. Can we ask the minister whether there is to be a policy change, so that deportees are not detained at Cornton Vale?

Ms MacDonald: The deportees did not commit a criminal offence while they were here; their offence is that they entered the country illegally. Is that right?

Mrs Mulligan: Yes, they are people—

Mrs McIntosh: They are people whose cases have been—

The Convener: Can we have some order? We are happy to include it in the report that we do not think that Cornton Vale is suitable accommodation for deportees. That is as much information as we were officially given at Cornton Vale. It is fair to put that point to the Deputy Minister for Justice in order to get clarification, which is the point that Mary Mulligan made. Let us get on the record what is now to happen to asylum seekers.

Are there any other suggestions for additions to the report? If there are none, every member must be happy with the report. I thank the clerks for putting together the report. We will have an additional section in the report on women's health to pick up some of the points that have been made by committee members.

Subordinate Legislation

The Convener: Item 2 is on a statutory instrument The Sex Offenders (Notification Requirements) (Prescribed Police Stations) Regulations 2001. I refer members to the note that has been prepared by the clerks, which sets out the background to and the procedure for the statutory instrument. No action is required. The committee can simply note the statutory instrument. Of course, should any member wish to move against the statutory instrument, we would need a motion to annul, for which there is a deadline. Are members happy to note the statutory instrument?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: The statutory instrument sets out the designated police stations for sex offenders, so it is straightforward.

Consultative Steering Group Principles

The Convener: Item 3 is on the Procedures Committee's inquiry into the consultative steering group principles. Members have a note, which says that the Procedures Committee is asking whether we wish to make a submission or to present oral evidence on how the committees have embraced the CSG principles of sharing power, accountability, accessibility and equal opportunities. If members wish to make a submission, we will have to discuss what will be included in it. The original deadline was 26 June, which is a bit tight, so the deadline has been extended to the end of the recess. The first decision we must make is whether, in principle, the committee wishes to make a submission to the Procedures Committee.

Christine Grahame: Can I ask a stupid question? Who are power, accountability, accessibility and equal opportunities being shared with?

The Convener: There is a note that explains that accountability is in relation to the Executive, accessibility is in relation to the public, and equal opportunities goes across the board in terms of the way in which we apply policies and procedures.

Christine Grahame: I see that those principles also apply to the legislators—the members. We have had difficulty getting information out of ministers; for example, getting information on the cost per prisoner place was like drawing teeth from a hen. Suddenly we see the light, and find that we have been talking about different things.

It took a year to get that information. The request had a real purpose, which was obvious to the Executive. I might be wrong, but I do not think that accountability is evident when it takes so long to get one simple fact.

The Convener: In principle, we must make a submission. The purpose of the CSG and its view on the importance of the committees must be embraced.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I agree with that, convener.

This is also an opportunity for the committee to reflect on what it has achieved, especially through the evidence that it has taken on a variety of subjects. Women's offending, which we have just discussed, strikes me as a matter that would not have been aired at Westminster. The committee should take the opportunity to say that we have given people from different parts of Scottish society the opportunity to put their points and we

have pursued with ministers the issues that they raised. On the principle of power sharing, which the CSG stated, there is a good opportunity to say what the committee has been doing on sharing power with people.

Christine Grahame: I endorse that. Everybody says—I think it is true—that the committees are the success story of the Parliament, not only because of their openness and accessibility to the public, but because we try to prise open the Scottish Executive's secret drawers, if I can put it that way. We are still learning; we are not succeeding very often because there are a lot of civil service defences to break down. The Scottish Office was not used to this, but the Scottish Executive must get used to it. We must change the Executive's attitude. The committees are open and accessible, but much more must be done to make the Executive more open and accessible.

The Convener: To continue Tavish Scott's theme, we have a lot to say about this because of the experiences of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, the Justice 1 Committee and the Justice 2 Committee in putting together legislation. Four members of this committee were party to the development of the first committee bill—the Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Bill. It is important to examine how that came about, and we have a lot to say on that.

The Justice and Home Affairs Committee dealt with the first major bill, the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill. That bill demonstrated how the public view could be taken on board. A considerable weight of opinion from organisations and individuals was taken on board through oral evidence and correspondence. It might be worthwhile to trawl through the archives of the justice committees; that will give us headings for inclusion in the report, on which we think we have done well or not so well.

We should consider accessibility in terms of how easy it has been for members of the public to make their views known; that relates to the issue of public petitions. On accountability, we could examine how we have questioned the Executive and executive agencies on specific issues. In fairness to the committee, we have brought a few matters into the public arena, especially on the Scottish Prison Service.

Equal opportunities was the other theme of the CSG principles. We have had a fairly equal-opportunity friendly agenda in the justice committees. We have demonstrated that a committee that has a wide and general remit can consider gender-specific issues.

Mrs McIntosh: I will discuss two aspects of accessibility. I am concerned about the agencies that want to come to talk to the committee to

present their cases; we put a huge imposition on them financially by doing that. Preparing evidence and coming to the committee has placed a financial strain on several organisations.

The other aspect of accessibility is physical accessibility of buildings. One occasion that especially comes to mind is when the committee meeting was in the Hub and one person who attended had great difficulty getting up the stairs.

Tavish Scott: You will just have to vote for the new Parliament building.

Mrs McIntosh: Perhaps we should have made a point of looking into that when we came here.

Christine Grahame: I am holding the jackets.

Mrs McIntosh: Careful.

Ms MacDonald: We should not talk about accessibility, accountability and the new Scottish Parliament building in the same breath.

The Convener: That is not a subject for this meeting.

Christine Grahame: I agree with what has been said about accessibility. We have given people the opportunity to give evidence to us—for example, on prisons. The problem comes when we take evidence from the Executive. We are still learning. We are improving our ability to scrutinise the budget and to hold the Executive to account. I feel as if we are beginning to get somewhere on that, which helps the agencies that come to give evidence to us. We took much more evidence during recent scrutiny of the budget, to help us read between the figures and get to the truth.

We are very proactive in trying, through the Parliament website and through our press releases, to make the public aware of the issues that we are considering. That helps us to be informed when the ministers appear before us. We still have difficulties with the ministerial teams. Quite rightly, they will not tell us everything unless we have sharpened our pens. I have used mixed metaphors galore, but there we are.

The Convener: The point that I want to make will ring true for every member of a Scottish Parliament committee. We are all back benchers and whether we are constituency MSPs or list MSPs, we have responsibilities to our constituents. However, we also receive correspondence from outside the geographical boundaries of our constituencies, because of the work that we do. The Justice 2 Committee has received a fair whack of such correspondence. The fact that we deal with correspondence that extends well beyond our remit as back-bench members shows that we have embraced the work of the committees.

Christine Grahame: The wonders of the

committees are not known to the public, which only sees show time—otherwise known as question time—and the odd debate on television. I would like the Procedures Committee to pursue the idea of televising what I call raw footage of a committee meeting. It would not have to be the same committee all the time. We could televise meetings such as our meeting two weeks ago during which we took evidence from reformed drug addicts. People would then be able to see what the committees are doing and to understand the worth of the Parliament.

It is all very well our saying what is happening, but the public does not know about it. I would like us to say something in our submission about the media and about televising committee meetings. I am not talking about programmes being shown at midnight, when everyone has gone to sleep.

Ms MacDonald: That relates to a point that is made in annexe 2, which states:

“the Scottish Parliament should be **accessible, open, responsive** and develop procedures which make possible a **participative** approach”.

To be frank, we have not done that. I know that we play at it and that we have a television service. However, Christine Grahame gave a startling example—and there have been many others—of how our broadcasting has failed to highlight the work of the committees. Another problem is the physical arrangements for taking evidence, which we often do either in the sardine can or up the road in the Hub. This is a marketing and promotional exercise; it is a bridge-building exercise with the people who are paying for the Parliament, and we have not done it very well. We might think that we have, but if we were to ask people they would say that we have not. They do not know what happens in here.

The Convener: Christine Grahame made a good point. We should say something in our submission about getting the committees more air time, so that the general public can have a better insight into what committees of the Parliament do. I know that BBC Parliament broadcasts committee proceedings on a Sunday afternoon.

Christine Grahame: We could have a parliamentary channel. There are lines that are suitable for that. I am not talking about edited programmes that are subject to the whim of the various broadcasting companies. I am talking about a parliamentary channel. If, for example, the Rural Development Committee was taking evidence on foot-and-mouth disease, that could be broadcast. That would enable the community to participate in our work and to see the detail of a committee meeting, rather than just edited highlights that provide the viewer with no sense of the in-depth evidence taking that goes on. The questions that we ask are the questions that

people outside the Parliament want to ask. That is what the Parliament is supposed to be here for.

15:30

The Convener: We will include a line in our submission about that.

We have one more meeting before the recess, on Tuesday 26 June. I will ask the clerk to produce a draft note that we can amend by e-mail. We all agree on the general points that need to be made, and it is important that we make a submission to the Procedures Committee.

That was the last item on the agenda for today's meeting. I remind members that on Thursday 14 June there will be a stage 1 debate on the International Criminal Court (Scotland) Bill. Subject to Parliament's approving the bill at stage 1, we will begin stage 2 consideration of it at our meeting on 26 June. Until we see how many amendments to the bill are lodged, it will not be clear how long we will need on 26 June. However, we must anticipate needing the full day. I ask members to bear that in mind. The latest date by which amendments to the bill may be lodged is Friday 22 June.

At our meeting on 26 June we should have an opportunity to consider written evidence that has been received for our inquiry into the Procurator Fiscal Service. Members will recall that we set a deadline for the receipt of information from members of the public. That deadline has passed, so we might have a chance to consider the information that has been submitted.

That ends today's business. I thank members for their attendance. I look forward to seeing everybody at Thursday's debate.

Meeting closed at 15:32.

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