

JUSTICE 2 COMMITTEE

Tuesday 11 November 2003
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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JUSTICE 2 COMMITTEE

14th Meeting 2003, Session 2

CONVENER

*Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

*Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP)

*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD)

*Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP)

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Gillian Baxendine

Lynn Tullis

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Irene Fleming

ASSISTANT CLERK

Richard Hough

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Justice 2 Committee

Tuesday 11 November 2003

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:02*]

Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill

The Convener (Miss Annabel Goldie): I welcome everyone to the 14th meeting this session of the Justice 2 Committee. The first item on today's agenda concerns our approach to the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill.

Members should all have a copy of the note that I asked be prepared to set out the factual background to the bill. Obviously, it will be for the committee to decide what it wants to do in relation to the bill, but if it decides to seek more time, I will have to address the Parliamentary Bureau this afternoon. The Presiding Officer has agreed that I may attend the meeting to do so if that is necessary.

We need to give some thought to the aspects of scrutiny. On the first page of the note, we have tried to detail what we think are the key parts of the bill for scrutiny by this committee. The next question that arises is whether there are any other parts that members feel should be central to our scrutiny.

Do members think that the list of areas for scrutiny is reasonably comprehensive?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We need to think about which witnesses we want to talk to. The Scottish Parliament information centre has given us a helpful note of the sort of witnesses to whom it thinks we should speak. I stress that three committees are involved in the bill—the lead committee is the Communities Committee and the secondary committees are this committee and the Local Government and Transport Committee. We are anxious to avoid duplication of evidence taking, which is why paragraph 7 of the note indicates the areas on which this committee might want to focus. Does anyone have any thoughts on that?

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): It is reasonable to try to have a tight focus on the evidence that we will take. For that reason, I am slightly concerned that some of the people from

whom we propose to take oral evidence are likely also to be called by the Communities Committee. It would be enormously helpful to have clarity as to who will call whom.

The Convener: We will turn to that. Does that mean that you would review the focus slightly, or is the focus okay, providing we rein in the witnesses a little?

Jackie Baillie: The focus is fine.

The Convener: Okay. That takes us to the annex from SPICe, which was helpful. The original version that I received had 11 proposals, but the second version took out the Scottish Police Federation, the idea being that the Communities Committee would want to address that area. Was that the rationale?

Gillian Baxendine (Clerk): Yes. The Communities Committee has not yet made firm decisions about whom it will hear from, but we understand that it is likely to call the police. One possibility is that we call different police organisations. Another is that we both call the police, which may be sensible.

The Convener: Are there any thoughts from members?

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I take Jackie Baillie's point. Looking through the list of witnesses, I would have thought that it would be appropriate for us to take evidence from all of them, with a couple of exceptions, because they are more likely to consider things in which we are interested. The exceptions—or the ones that the Communities Committee and we might argue about—are Safeguarding Communities-Reducing Offending, Apex Scotland and Children 1st, which could probably usefully be heard by either committee. There is a bit of a grey area, but the other organisations are probably all focused on the areas that would be of primary interest to this committee.

The Convener: Would you be happy to retain the rest of the list?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes.

The Convener: Are there any other comments?

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I agree with Nicola Sturgeon that most of the witnesses suggested by SPICe are the right people for us to listen to during our stage 1 deliberations. However, before listening to SACRO, Apex Scotland and Children 1st, we should check that they are not being invited to go to the Communities Committee, because there is no need for duplication. Should the Communities Committee not be hearing from those organisations, we would want to hear from them, but it is likely that the Communities Committee will

want to speak to them first and, as the lead committee, it should do so.

The Convener: Does that reflect the view of the committee?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will check whether the Communities Committee intends to speak to those organisations but, if it does not, this committee will certainly want to hear from them.

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): Rather than ask the Communities Committee, is it possible for us to say that we had a look at this issue and, because of time constraints, we suggest that the Communities Committee should see those witnesses?

The Convener: We can do that. It is six of one and half a dozen of the other. The point is that those three organisations must give evidence in the process.

Mike Pringle: All I am doing is trying to encourage the Communities Committee to see them, not us.

The Convener: That is up to the Communities Committee. Somebody has got to hear from them. The Communities Committee will have to make a decision on that.

Jackie Baillie: I agree that the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration should come before the committee. Could we also invite the chairs of some of the children's panels, because we might get a slightly different view?

The Convener: That would have my blessing. Would that have everyone's agreement?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I am aware that there is an absence of voices from the social work element, either from social workers or from the Association of Directors of Social Work. Again, the Communities Committee may intend to take that evidence.

Karen Whitefield: That is true, but I understand that the Local Government and Transport Committee has started its deliberations, and that it is examining specifically the impact that the bill will have on the operation of local government, so I would have thought—although I am not sure—that it is more likely that the Local Government and Transport Committee should hear from social workers.

The Convener: Certainly social workers are not on the proposed list. My anxiety was that they should not be missed out, because they have a significant opinion to express about the bill. Rather like our approach to the Communities Committee's

evidence gathering, we should ensure that the social work voice is being heard by some committee and, if it is not, pick it up. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: That is helpful. Would anybody like to make any other comments about witnesses? What about the Minister for Justice? The minister in charge of the bill's passage through the Parliament is the Minister for Communities, who will almost certainly give evidence to the Communities Committee. However, given the proportion of the bill that seems to relate to justice interests, the question arises whether it would be desirable for us to hear from the Minister for Justice. Is that the committee's view?

Members indicated agreement.

Nicola Sturgeon: We should leave the Minister for Justice until the end of our oral evidence taking.

The Convener: I agree—that is the logical place to do it. I am glad that the committee takes that view, as it would be strange not to have the opinion of the Minister for Justice.

That brings us to timetabling. I hope that it was helpful to the committee to give a working illustration of the timetabling options. As members will see, we have two options. Option 1 covers the timetable that the Executive is anxious to adopt and its implications for the committee. I should mention that the position is slightly affected by recent information that the Communities Committee has extended its deadline for written evidence to 30 January. It was always our assumption that we would be privy to whatever written evidence the Communities Committee was getting, because that would clearly lead to our consideration of the bill being more complete. I mention that because it colours in the practical significance of option 1.

The nub of option 1 is that everything else is put to one side—I should have made that clear at the outset. Every other area of work that the committee was thinking of is swept to one side with either of the options to let us concentrate exclusively on the bill. Therefore, option 1 would mean us beginning this month with our call for written evidence. We would then approach witnesses, issue invitations for oral evidence and commence the taking of oral evidence on 16 December. I have discussed with the clerks whether that can be accelerated in any way, but we do not think that it can—that would be to put the cart before the horse, as we would probably be asking witnesses to give oral evidence when we were still examining written evidence.

There is no way that we can concertina option 1 any further. We have tried to build in as much as we can, which allows for three oral evidence-taking sessions. The note says:

"09/01 Communities Committee deadline for written evidence".

That deadline is now 30 January. We would still be working as best we could. That means that we would have to consider our draft report by the end of January and agree the final report by the beginning of February so that we could get it to the Communities Committee by 5 February. The time scale is tight—I do not think that anyone will disagree. That is option 1.

Option 2 is that I go to the Parliamentary Bureau and seek, if possible, a further couple of weeks, which would build in a little more space for us.

One issue that troubles me is the preparation of the draft report. It is important that the report is properly considered on the basis of the evidence that we receive and that the text is not rushed into just any form because we have to meet a deadline. It seems to me that option 2 would give the committee a more realistic opportunity to do a satisfactory job in scrutinising the bill.

The clerks produced option 3, which is theoretical. The option is not attractive to me because it would, in effect, put the committee outside the legislative framework. The committee could continue its inquiries and publish a report, but by that time, we would be completely out of kilter with the process and, frankly, of limited relevance to it. I question whether that would be an acceptable use of the committee's time. The clerks were right to make us aware of the option, but I think that its working attraction is not strong.

I need to be guided by members on timetabling.

14:15

Jackie Baillie: From informal discussions that we have had, my understanding was that the date of 5 February was flexible. The flexibility was dependent on when the Communities Committee considered its draft report. I am unclear about whether that flexibility exists and when the deadline is for the Communities Committee. I understand that that committee has agreed a timetable.

The Convener: I defer to the clerk.

Gillian Baxendine: Our understanding is that the Communities Committee intends to begin consideration of its draft report at the meeting immediately after 5 February. The Communities Committee should get our report in time to circulate it with its draft report, because past experience suggests that, if a secondary committee's report is received in time for the

consideration of a lead committee's second draft report, that committee is much less likely to be influenced by the secondary committee's recommendations. Although, in theory, the Communities Committee could take our report into account if we sent it later than 5 February, it is much less likely that it would have the time to do so.

Jackie Baillie: I want to tease out that issue. If we submitted a draft report that had not been completely signed off, to what extent could the Communities Committee accommodate that? That committee would have the general thrust of our report, with the caveat that we could tighten it thereafter.

Gillian Baxendine: It is for the committee to decide whether it wants to do that.

The Convener: Jackie Baillie suggests an interim report to guide the Communities Committee on our thinking. That is a practical option, if the committee is so minded.

Nicola Sturgeon: It is a practical option, but it is not ideal. We are talking about a difference of two weeks. As the bill is, arguably, one of the most important bills that will be discussed in this session of Parliament, we should not rush or cut corners for the sake of such a short time scale. I prefer option 2, because it would give us extra breathing space: it would give the clerks extra time to draft the report and would allow us time to consider it. In the scheme of things, option 2 would not delay the bill much, so it is not essential that we choose option 1. Given the overall length of the process, a couple of extra weeks would not be critical, but they could make all the difference to our scrutiny.

Karen Whitefield: Last week, the convener said that she had pushed the Executive on the time scale and mentioned that there has been some give by the Executive. Is that reflected in option 1? Has the Executive allowed us two extra weeks? All members of the committee want to carry out the process properly and to consider the issues thoroughly. However, I have concerns about option 2 because, although we are an important secondary committee, we are a secondary committee on the bill. The bill is primarily a piece of communities legislation. We should attempt to fit in with the timetable on which the Communities Committee has agreed.

In attempting to do that, we should consider meeting twice in one week to allow us to hear all the evidence that we want to hear. Alternatively, we could have evidence-hearing sessions in the morning and the afternoon on a Tuesday in the new year. That would give us flexibility and would mean that we do not put too much pressure on the clerks. The proposal would ensure that our report is well thought through and that all members have

been given an opportunity to have the things that they want in the report. It would also allow us to meet the deadlines that the Communities Committee has imposed on us.

The Convener: That is helpful. The background is that, informally, an even tighter timetable was put to our clerks by the Executive. Frankly, it was unworkable and I said that. I did not think that there was even any point in bringing it to the committee, as it would have made quite impossible our task of scrutinising. To that extent, there was flexibility, if you can call it flexibility. I made it clear that I could not ask the committee to work to the timetable that was originally proposed, which is how there arose option 1. I thought that it was proper for that to go to the committee; however, I thought, equally, that the committee should see a second option, just to provide a little more elasticity.

The insertion of additional oral evidence sessions is not impossible. I am just considering what we agreed earlier. It is possible that, if the Communities Committee takes evidence from SACRO, Apex and Children 1st, that would slightly alleviate our evidence-taking sessions. However, we propose to invite the children's panel chairmen, in some form, the Minister for Justice and social work services, if they are not covered by any other committee. Although, technically, there is no reason why we cannot have double sittings—I am looking at the clerks because that would have to fit in with the availability of accommodation—that would not get us entirely out of the woods, in terms of pressure. I also think, based on my experience, that when a committee has been taking evidence for three hours, it is difficult for members to remain fresh. Going on to have an extra session in the afternoon when the committee has been at it all morning is quite a challenging proposition; nevertheless, that is in the hands of the committee.

I am grateful to Karen Whitefield for asking about the original timetable, which was as I have outlined. Do other members have any thoughts on the matter?

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): It depends on whether we are going to consider inviting the same people to give evidence to us as will give evidence to the Communities Committee or whether the witnesses will be totally separate. In the past, when the Justice 1 Committee has been the secondary committee, it has sent a reporter to the lead committee to ask specific legal questions of witnesses. For example, a member of the Justice 1 Committee attended the Health and Community Care Committee to ask questions on the Mental Health (Scotland) Bill. I wonder whether there is any scope for our doing likewise.

The Convener: Theoretically, that is possible. However, I draw members' attention to the nature of the bill, in which seven of its 13 parts are concerned with justice issues. As convener, I also express concern about losing a member of the committee as reporter to another committee when we are in the throes of trying to process ingathering of evidence. I do not feel that the committee would benefit from being weakened in that way.

Maureen Macmillan: No, it would not; however, the Communities Committee does not meet at the same time as the Justice 2 Committee. In the case that I mentioned, the clerks read the *Official Report* of the Health and Community Care Committee to see what questions had been asked and what answers had been given. I was a reporter at that time and I attended the Health and Community Care Committee to question the sheriffs on the Mental Health (Scotland) Bill.

The Convener: That is a practical possibility, although I am not sure to what extent it would take us forward.

Maureen Macmillan: I just wondered whether it would take us forward. Such action would presuppose that there was evidence that we could take at the same time that the Communities Committee was taking evidence; for example, from SACRO, if we had been intending to call SACRO ourselves.

The Convener: We would not do that if the Communities Committee was doing that. The point is that we are trying to avoid duplication of work. It is important that, in the evidence-taking process, the committees have clearly defined responsibilities for the categories of witnesses from whom they are going to take evidence. I do not think that your suggestion would solve our particular problem. One way or another, a committee will have to deal with the witnesses.

Nicola Sturgeon: There should be no duplication of work; indeed, such duplication can be quite easily avoided. I was a member of the Health and Community Care Committee when the Mental Health (Scotland) Bill was being considered. That bill was substantively different from the bill that we are discussing—it was a health bill that had justice implications. I suspect that the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill has gone to the Communities Committee simply because the Minister for Communities is the lead minister. Whether the bill's lead committee should be the Communities Committee or one of the justice committees could be argued—the matter is finely balanced. To a large extent, the bill is a justice bill as much as—if not more than—it is a communities bill.

I agree with Karen Whitefield: normally, a secondary committee would strive to fit in with the lead committee's timetable, but the case in question is slightly different because of the nature of the bill. I do not have a closed mind about possible compromises. We can have extra meetings if that is practical and if enough time is left for the draft report. That would be fair enough. However, we are talking about only a couple of weeks. If that is the difference between our doing things properly and our cutting corners, I am not sure that it would be a big deal to delay the process by two weeks.

The Convener: I now have a practical difficulty. If members want me to appear at the Parliamentary Bureau, I will have to leave the committee pronto. Members must therefore reach a view on timetabling. There are two options. I suggest that members who support option 1 should so indicate.

Jackie Baillie: Perhaps there should be a caveat. We could consider a full-day sitting, if that is necessary and appropriate.

Mike Pringle: I agree.

Jackie Baillie: We should also consider producing an interim report, which would give the clerks an extra week. There would be a similar time scale for writing the report, as mentioned in option 2.

The Convener: So—a caveat should be attached to option 1.

Jackie Baillie: Yes.

Nicola Sturgeon: What would happen if such proposals proved to be impossible? I do not know about the practical arrangements for having an extra sitting.

Jackie Baillie: We could revisit the matter.

Nicola Sturgeon: We cannot—I presume that the bureau will agree to a time scale this afternoon.

Gillian Baxendine: With previous bills, we have gone back to the bureau and asked for more time later in the process. That is theoretically possible.

The Convener: The question is, that option 1, with the caveat as outlined by Jackie Baillie, be agreed to. Are members agreed?

Members: No.

The Convener: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

AGAINST

Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Convener: The result of the division is: For 4, Against 3, Abstentions 0.

I do not think that there is any need to take further views because the committee's position has been determined—the committee supports option 1. I have been spared an appearance at the bureau—someone should let the bureau know—and Karen Whitefield has been spared having to sit in the hot seat as deputy convener while I abandon the committee.

The clerks will obviously inform the other two committees about our discussions as a matter of courtesy. They should also inform the Minister for Justice so that she has notice that she will be required for our evidence session.

Members will see from the timetabling that we should immediately agree our approach to witnesses and that we should without delay issue invitations to witnesses for oral evidence. I assume that everything will be made public on the website. We will also intimate the deadline for written evidence from justice witnesses.

Given the caveats attached to support for option 1, the clerks should immediately clarify the logistics of the extra evidence-gathering session. I think that Karen Whitefield is right; that meeting must happen in January because to try to concertina it into December would be unworkable.

Karen Whitefield: There could be a session on a Tuesday morning or a Wednesday morning—I have no preference. Perhaps that would address the convener's concerns about there being an all-day sitting and about people's concentration.

Gillian Baxendine: It is much easier to get a room on a Tuesday morning than on a Wednesday morning.

The Convener: We are in the clerks' hands. They should do what they can. I thank them for their assistance.

I will also ask the clerks to clarify who is to deal with which witnesses. Given our time constraints, that is also important. I want clarity from the word go on which committee is to deal with which witnesses.

I think that that is all that we need to say about the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill at the moment.

Subordinate Legislation

Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2003 (SSI 2003/486)

14:30

The Convener: Papers have been circulated for this item. Members have a note from the clerk on SSI 2003/486, although I think that I am correct in saying that the regulations were not communicated to anyone for comment. All that we have on the regulations is what is before the committee today. As members do not have questions or comments to make, I propose that we note the regulations.

Members indicated agreement.

Scottish Legal Aid Board (Employment of Solicitors to Provide Criminal Legal Assistance) Amendment Regulations 2003 (SSI 2003/511)

The Convener: Members also have a note on SSI 2003/511 and the Subordinate Legislation Committee's recommendation on the regulations, in which that committee slightly qualifies its approval of the regulations. We have time to come back to the regulations on 25 November. If members so desire, we can apply for further information from the Executive. Does that suggestion meet with members' approval?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I ask the clerks to prepare a letter forthwith.

Proposed Youth Justice Inquiry

14:32

The Convener: The third item on the agenda concerns the possibility of holding a youth justice inquiry. The clerks have helpfully prepared an approach paper, which is based on what we discussed in general terms at the very beginning of the session.

Substantive issues arise in the approach paper. We have to be realistic about what is in front of us in respect of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill because I am anxious that we do nothing to distract us from our consideration of the bill. We should be mindful of that constraint before we become too ambitious about progressing the inquiry. I would rather progress it against the backdrop of a slightly more relaxed schedule; I do not want us to make decisions that ultimately we find it impossible to comply with.

Members will see from the paper that we need to resolve our approach to the inquiry. The suggestions include holding a seminar and appointment of an adviser. It seems to me that it will be impossible in practical terms to implement the inquiry before February of next year. It may be realistic for us to do some preparatory work at this stage, or perhaps we should think a little longer about it before we determine what we want to do during the remainder of February, March and so on. I am open to suggestions.

Nicola Sturgeon: I suggest that we go ahead with what I consider to be the first step, which is to hold the seminar as set out in the paper. The seminar would bring together some of the stakeholders and allow us to have a reasonably informal discussion with them about areas of priority. Even more important, it would allow us to address areas of priority that are not being covered by some other inquiry at the moment. It would be useful to arrange such a seminar and we could probably do so in reasonably short order, although it could probably not be held before February. If we organised such a discussion as a first step, we could go from there and refine our thoughts and our focus on the matter.

Mike Pringle: I was going to say something similar to that. We should agree now to go ahead with organising the seminar, which would offer a positive way forward. Apart from anything else, it would give people plenty of notice, and they could take their time to think about the subject, rather than come to it quickly.

If we are definitely going to go ahead with a seminar, should we think about whom to appoint as an adviser? It would take only a few minutes to consider that, so we could put that on the agenda some time between now and February.

The Convener: I have been looking at our diary. Provided—remember that “provided”—that we do not have to go back to the Parliamentary Bureau because of some problem with the time scale, the way will be clear to go ahead with the seminar. We will agree our final report on the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill on 3 February, then we will have time to discuss matters before that month’s recess. It looks as though a seminar cannot be timed to proceed before the end of February or the beginning of March. It takes time to set up such events, to decide who we want to be there, and to issue the invitations and all the rest of it.

There is something of a chicken-and-egg situation around the appointment of an adviser. It might be that, until we hold the seminar, we do not know the areas on which we will try to concentrate. Until we hold the seminar, we might be slightly at a loss to know who we would want as an adviser.

Gillian Baxendine: My thought was that we could appoint an adviser for a short period in order to help run the seminar. The adviser could advise us on whom to invite and could identify names and produce some kind of output from the event. If we do not like that adviser, or if he or she is not suitable, we will have taken them on for only a short period. If, however, that adviser is very good, we will have someone available for the inquiry.

Jackie Baillie: That is a sensible proposal. There is a considerable amount of work involved in ensuring that the right people go along to such an event. They also need to be prepared in advance of coming to the seminar. The appointment of an adviser will help with that process and will ease the pressure on the clerks in the short term.

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): I agree that the seminar is a good idea. We should, with advance notice, be able to make it as good as we want it to be.

Maureen Macmillan: In the previous session, the Justice 1 Committee did a report on alternatives to custody, which covered some aspects of youth justice. It would be a shame to duplicate that work, but we could ascertain whether things have moved on since the time of that report. We took a lot of evidence from organisations such as SACRO and Apex Scotland on alternatives to custody.

Nicola Sturgeon: Is that the report that we will debate tomorrow in Parliament?

Maureen Macmillan: Yes. We do not want to revisit the whole subject, but it would be useful to find out whether things have moved on.

Karen Whitefield: Like other members, I think that holding a seminar is a really good idea. There

is, however, the potential for our inquiry to grow legs and walk away on its own, because it could turn out to be so wide ranging that we might never be able to reach any conclusions. One of the benefits of holding a seminar is that it would give all members of the committee an opportunity to hear from representatives of all the agencies and organisations concerned, as well as from stakeholders who have an interest in the field. That will help us to focus on what we want to get out of the inquiry.

Although I thought at first that we would not need an adviser until we had held the seminar, I agree that it might be helpful to the clerks to have an adviser to help organise the seminar. I participated in a similar event during the previous Parliament, so I know that members of the Social Justice Committee found that the exercise was worth their while, as did the social justice organisations that took part. There is real potential for the seminar to enhance our work.

The Convener: The committee clearly supports the idea of holding a seminar, not earlier than the end of February and possibly into March. There is also support for use of an adviser to focus our thoughts on the construction of the seminar and on whom we invite.

That being the case, we should delegate to the clerks the job of presenting to us some names for consideration in the appointment of an adviser. I presume that we need approval from the Parliamentary Bureau to incur that expense. Perhaps, at the same time, the clerks would like to consider possible timing and location of the seminar. Does anybody have any views on that?

Mike Pringle: That is the question I just asked Jackie Baillie. I said, “Where’s it gonna be?”

The Convener: I have been involved in two similar events. One was in the chamber, which was very successful because, with video and audio aids, the chamber was ideally suited to everybody who wanted to be present to contribute. It is within the Parliament precinct so no charge arises, and it is centrally located. The other event was in the Edinburgh International Conference Centre. Again, the facilities were superb and the venue was central and easy to get to.

We do not need to make a decision about a location today. I ask committee members to go away and mull it over and to be prepared to indicate their views. The location will depend on the number of people that we will have. It is wise to be as expansive as we can, within reason—there is no point in asking 22 people to come. We should try to broaden participation as much as we can—obviously we want to include young people. Committee members might have some idea about how we can most conveniently accommodate all

those points. I ask the committee to consider the matter; if members have ideas, you can put them to the clerks and we can make a decision once we have considered nominations for an adviser. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Do the clerks need anything else by way of guidance about that?

Gillian Baxendine: At some stage, we will need more detailed guidance about the types of participants, but I am happy to come back to that at a future meeting.

The Convener: Perhaps the adviser will help with that.

We now move into private session for final consideration of our stage 1 report on the Vulnerable Witnesses (Scotland) Bill.

14:41

Meeting continued in private until 14:53.

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