

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 12 September 2007

Session 3

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

3rd Meeting 2007, Session 3

CONVENER

*Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)

*Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP)

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

*David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)

*Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

*Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP)

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Jane McEwan

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 12 September 2007

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Duncan McNeil): I open the third meeting of the Local Government and Communities Committee this session. The first item on our agenda is a decision on taking item 3 in private. Do we agree to take that item in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Budget Adviser

10:00

The Convener: For item 2, members have in front of them a paper—which they have had time to read—on budget scrutiny and the appointment of an adviser. I invite members' comments, which could lead to our making a formal decision this morning.

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): I would like a couple of points to be clarified. I am happy with the layout of the paper and with the suggested remit and person specification of the adviser, but is the post likely to attract a number of applications, and will there therefore be an interview process, or will the appointment be made on a more informal basis?

The Convener: If we agree to appoint an adviser, my experience from other committees is that we will probably have a list of suitable people. We will then discuss those people, draw up a short list, and decide whether it is necessary to proceed to an interview.

Jim Tolson: Thank you. I also want to ask about the work of the adviser, which the paper says

"should be completed within 15 days."

That seems quite tight. I understand from correspondence why 15 days has been chosen, but what would happen if the adviser's work took more than 15 days? I am thinking in particular of the committee's finances, because we are limited in our budget as much as in our timescales.

The Convener: I understand that we would have to make another application to seek approval to extend the timescale.

Jim Tolson: Thank you.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): The local government finance settlement for next year, and the likely scenario for ensuing years in light of the spending review, will be a big part of our job. How will the level of scrutiny that we are required to undertake—or are expected to undertake, or should undertake—compare with the level of scrutiny that the Finance Committee will undertake? Is there an overlap, or is there a discrete area that we will consider, such as the broad figure of the local government settlement and then, below that, the different levels of the budget? Where is the crossover with the Finance Committee, or is there no crossover?

The Convener: I have no experience with this committee, but in the Health Committee in the previous session of Parliament we took a broad look initially. However, we will be able to focus on particular areas and do more detailed work in order to achieve greater scrutiny or a change in practice. Is that correct, Martin?

Martin Verity (Clerk): That is correct, convener. The committee can consider issues across the whole of its remit or it can focus on a particular issue. The Finance Committee will, of course, take the co-ordinating and lead role in scrutinising the budget. The Finance Committee is likely to consider local government in particular, but that will not prevent this committee from considering the local government part or any other part of its remit.

The Convener: It would obviously be sensible to speak to the convener of the Finance Committee and to our adviser before deciding whether we want to focus on certain areas. The convener of the Finance Committee has suggested informally that more considered work should take place with the advisers of all the committees. Ideas are being developed that we may hear about in the coming weeks.

David McLetchie: Thank you.

The Convener: Do members have any further questions? Last cut? If there are no further questions, do members agree that we should formally proceed to appoint an adviser?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you.

Members agreed that we should take item 3 in private. I ask the members of the public who are present to allow us to do that.

10:05

Meeting continued in private until 10:21.

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