

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 10 December 2008

Session 3

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

32nd Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP)

*Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

*David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)

*Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)

*Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)

*John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP)

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

David McLaren

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 10 December 2008

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

Review of SPCB-supported Bodies

The Convener (Duncan McNeil): I welcome everyone to the 32nd meeting in 2008 of the Local Government and Communities Committee. As I always do at this point, I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones and BlackBerrys.

Under item 1, the committee will consider a call for evidence from the Review of SPCB Supported Bodies Committee, which has been circulated to members. Do members have any views?

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): My initial view is that we have little time to take any evidence, but I am sure that other members will have views that they want to put on the record.

The Convener: Yes. We have the opportunity to do that. The clerks will take a note of the discussion and pass it on.

We are just discussing the review of Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body-supported bodies, David.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Yes. I am aware that that is under way. Do you want my view on it?

The Convener: I just wanted to check whether you had any views on it.

David McLetchie: As far as the Local Government and Communities Committee is concerned, our most obvious, direct experience of SPCB-supported bodies is our work with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, who comes to give evidence with her staff, usually on her annual reports. We have had a successful relationship in that regard.

Without taking evidence, it is difficult to know whether consolidating her role with anybody else's role is a good thing or a bad thing. I certainly have no particular complaints or concerns about the way that her office operates at present. However, I know that it has been suggested that other complaints-related functions might be added to hers. Would it be appropriate to put the complaints mechanisms of the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner and the commission that deals with complaints about councillors under the

broader heading of complaints about public services and the conduct of public officials or elected representatives? It is very difficult to know whether what is suggested is a positive thing or a negative thing without holding some kind of inquiry. At the moment, we can speak only about the office with which we are familiar.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I note the commissioners that have been included in the inquiry's remit. I do not know whether it is appropriate to bring this up, but the issue of bringing organisations together and trying to reduce the burden of government has arisen in response to the Crerar report. There is an issue around the Scottish Housing Regulator, in which the Local Government and Communities Committee takes an interest. I just want to put down a marker that there are concerns about the Scottish Housing Regulator being amalgamated with any other regulator, and I expect that we would want to make representations on that, although it is not mentioned in the brief that I have in front of me. I just want to flag up the issue to the clerks. If the Review of SPCB Supported Bodies Committee covers the issue, we might want to return to it.

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): The paper that we have sets out the six bodies that are covered by the review. I know that the Local Government and Communities Committee's schedule is tight over the next few months but, given that we do not have any written evidence from those bodies at this stage, it would be helpful if we could get the heads of each of them along to give us their views and their understanding of the situation, to see whether we can find any common ground before we report back.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I support what Jim Tolson said. Given the timing of the consultation, we do not have sufficient time to take evidence before the initial report must be submitted. However, we should put on record our desire to consider the issue at a later stage. We can ask the Review of SPCB Supported Bodies Committee to come back to us with its initial findings so that we can perhaps have an evidence-taking session with the bodies to which members have referred.

The Convener: We can ask to be kept informed of the work of the Review of SPCB Supported Bodies Committee, which has been set up on a cross-party basis under the convenership of the Deputy Presiding Officer, Trish Godman. I presume that the committee will consider issues of resourcing and duplication. In light of members' comments today, we will express an interest in being kept up to date with, and monitoring, the committee's work. If points of interest arise, we can communicate with the committee. In extreme

circumstances, we could find out what evidence the committee is taking. We do not want to duplicate the work of the committee, and we are also free to send one of our number to attend its meetings to keep a watching brief on things.

Are members agreed that we should express an interest but that we have no strong views at this point and look forward to being kept abreast of the work of the Review of SPCB Supported Bodies Committee?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Subordinate Legislation

Book of Scottish Connections Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/386)

Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/389)

Building (Fees) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/397)

10:07

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of three Scottish statutory instruments under the negative procedure. Members have not raised any concerns about any of the instruments and no motion to annul any of them has been lodged.

On SSI 2008/386, are members agreed that we have no recommendation to make to the Parliament on the regulations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I invite members to consider SSI 2008/389.

Mary Mulligan: When we discussed the introduction of energy performance certificates, we were concerned about whether people would be aware of their new obligations. I note that the regulations before us will extend the introduction period in recognition of the fact that people might not be aware of their obligation to provide such certificates. I note also that the Scottish Association of Landlords recently raised concerns about the extent to which its members are aware of the certificates. It might be worth flagging up to the Scottish Government the fact that it needs to do more work on ensuring that people are aware of them. I do not disagree with the regulations, but the committee might want to make that point.

The Convener: I appreciate that Mary Mulligan does not want to impede the progress of the regulations, so we will write to ministers to ask them to note the point that has been made. Taking that point on board, are members agreed that we have no recommendation to make to the Parliament on the regulations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: On SSI 2008/397, are members agreed that we have no recommendation to make to the Parliament on the regulations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I thank members for attending. I am sure that they have lots of work to get on with.

Meeting closed at 10:09.

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