

# **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 10 June 2003  
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

### 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting 2003, Session 2

#### OLDEST COMMITTEE MEMBER

\*Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP)

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)  
Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)  
\*Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
\*Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
\*Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab)  
\*David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)  
\*Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

\*attended

#### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

#### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Ruth Cooper

#### ASSISTANT CLERK

Neil Stewart

#### LOCATION

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament

### Local Government and Transport Committee

*Tuesday 10 June 2003*

*(Afternoon)*

[THE OLDEST COMMITTEE MEMBER *opened the meeting at 14:15*]

**Mr Andrew Welsh (Oldest Committee Member):** I am in the chair as the oldest committee member. That is a double-edged sword: it is a great honour to be in the chair, but being the oldest reminds me of mortality.

I welcome all members of the committee to the first meeting of the Local Government and Transport Committee in the second session of the Scottish Parliament. I am certainly looking forward to working with everybody on what is one of the major committees of the Parliament. I also welcome members of the press and public. I ask that all pagers and phones be switched off. Every convener is annoyed if they are not.

## Interests

**Mr Welsh:** My first task is to ask all members to declare their interests. I will start. My wife, Sheena Welsh, has been an Angus councillor for 23 years and she was re-elected in May. That is my only declarable interest for this committee.

**Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** Other than saying that I regularly have to suffer the vagaries of ScotRail when coming into Edinburgh, I have no interests to declare.

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** I will declare that I am a member of the Law Society of Scotland, should that be relevant to anything that comes before the committee.

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** The only interests that I have to declare come under the miscellaneous section in the register of members' interests. My wife is a councillor on West Lothian Council and I am a member of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association. The Livingston constituency Labour party has constituency development agreements with the trade unions, the TSSA and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.

**Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab):** I have nothing that has to be registered officially in the register of members' interests but, to be on the safe side, I will say that I am a member of the GMB, which has a substantial membership in local government.

**Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I have no declarable interests.

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** I have no declarable interests.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** To play safe, I will go through the lot. I am a member of the Transport and General Workers Union and the Educational Institute of Scotland. I am a member of the Scottish Educational Research Association and its British counterpart the Association for Science Education. I am also a member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds committee for Scotland.

## Convener

**Mr Welsh:** Item 2 on the agenda is the choosing of a convener. Under rule 12.1.2 of the standing orders, the Parliament decides, on a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau, the party whose members are eligible for nomination as convener of the committee. Motion S2M-107 was agreed on 4 June 2003; Parliament has thus agreed that members of the Labour party are eligible for nomination. I therefore seek nominations of members from that party.

**Mr McFee:** I nominate Bristow Muldoon.

**Mr Welsh:** One nomination has been received.

*Bristow Muldoon was chosen as convener.*

**Mr Welsh:** I now lay down my burden and am happy to hand over the convenership to Bristow.

**The Convener (Bristow Muldoon):** Thank you, colleagues, for choosing me as convener of the Local Government and Transport Committee, and thank you, Andrew, for chairing the opening part of the meeting. As Andrew suggested, this committee will certainly be one of the busiest and most important in the Parliament over the years to come. That applies to both aspects of its remit—local government and transport. I look forward to working with you all on our busy agenda.

## Deputy Convener

**The Convener:** The next item on our agenda is the choosing of a deputy convener. The process is similar to that for choosing a convener. Under the standing orders of the Parliament, it has been agreed that members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as deputy convener of the committee. I therefore seek nominations of a member from the Scottish National Party.

**Dr Jackson:** I nominate Andrew Welsh.

**The Convener:** One nomination has been received.

*Mr Andrew Welsh was chosen as deputy convener.*

**The Convener:** Congratulations, Andrew, on your appointment as deputy convener.

**Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** I thank the committee very much indeed and I look forward to our forthcoming work.

## Legacy Paper

**The Convener:** We have legacy papers from the old Local Government Committee and the old Transport and the Environment Committee. The papers cover work that went on during the first session of the Parliament and work that is on-going and likely to require the attention of this committee. In a minute I will ask members for comments on those papers. For our future business agenda, I suggest that it would be useful to have a briefing from Scottish Parliament information centre researchers at the committee's next meeting. The researchers will go over the proposals in the Executive's legislative programme and other issues that the committee may want to consider in the forthcoming period. We may want to have an away-day briefing session before the Parliament reconvenes in September. That would allow us to consider in more detail the sort of issues that we want to put on our agenda and it would lead to a formal paper for the committee's consideration.

Many issues to do with legislation will automatically come under our remit. The Executive's draft Local Governance (Scotland) Bill will, I expect, be a major part of our first year's work. There will also be the Budget Bill. Work done by the old Local Government Committee and the old Transport and the Environment Committee may also require further consideration—for example, the specifications of the Highlands and Islands ferry contract.

In the transport part of our portfolio, the committee will have to consider carefully how we interact with the European and External Relations Committee of this Parliament and, indeed, with the European Parliament. Many transport issues will be affected by decisions that are taken at European level and the Parliament will have to focus more on that than it did during its first four years.

Other major issues that will arise during the next four years include the re-let of the ScotRail franchise. I imagine that the committee will want to keep a close eye on that and, indeed, on the progress of the proposals for transport infrastructure investment. A whole range of issues will deserve the committee's time. We will be able to examine the work of the Executive and we will also start to propose areas that are not within the Executive's current programme but that the Executive should consider.

I will now ask members for their contributions, including whether they agree that we should have a briefing from SPICe at our next meeting and whether we should arrange an away day at the end of the summer recess. Members may feel that

the SPICe briefing should be held in private—the researchers will be considering, for example, possible advantages and disadvantages of legislation and, as employees of the Parliament, they may wish to do that in private rather than in public.

**Dr Jackson:** In the Local Government Committee in the first session of the Parliament, we had grave concerns about our involvement in the budget bill process. I wonder whether we might get a paper—perhaps from the clerks, as opposed to from SPICe—to re-emphasise some of the issues that we raised. I am a little worried about the timing of this year's Budget Bill and whether we have lost time because of the election—I would like that matter to be considered.

My second concern is about the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. The convener of the Local Government Committee frequently highlighted our reservations about the monitoring and evaluation of what had happened or was happening under the act. A big part of the act concerned community planning, but there were other aspects. It is important that we consider how we can ensure that legislation works on the ground.

**Mr Welsh:** I have a couple of small points about the legacy paper, which I found useful. Page 10 of the paper states:

"The Committee ... recommends to the successor committee that it examines the extent to which the current Committee's recommendations have been taken forward by the Executive."

That matter might be covered by sending a letter to the Executive to find out about the up-to-date situation.

The final sentence of the section entitled "Future legislation" states:

"it is likely that the new committee will face a significant time commitment to legislation."

Can the clerk indicate what the future programme might be? I look forward to the SPICe briefing, which should be in private to allow the people giving it to talk freely.

**The Convener:** Those are both relevant points. It would be perfectly appropriate for us to ask the Executive about the previous Local Government Committee's proposals and about how the prospective legislative programme will impact on us.

Sylvia Jackson's point is relevant to our consideration of the work programme. Now that the Parliament is in its second session, it might want to review aspects of legislation that was passed in the first session to find out whether that legislation has achieved the aims that the Parliament set out to achieve. I am sure that we

will not do that for every piece of legislation, but we might want to choose areas in which there are issues that need to be studied in detail.

**David Mundell:** I am generally happy with the approach that you outlined, convener. It would be helpful for members who are new to the local government part of the committee's remit—I served in local government, but that was a long time ago—if part of the briefing or the away day were used to summarise local government finance issues, if it is possible to do so on one page of A4. That would allow us to get our heads round the issue. All committee members will have been involved in some way with local government, but without hands-on experience one becomes remote from the issues, particularly funding matters. I am keen for such a briefing to be included in either the SPICe briefing or the away day.

In the previous session, the convener convened the Transport and the Environment Committee and I was on the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. It is important for a committee that has two major parts to its remit to try to achieve a balance between them, which is not always easy. Aside from the legislative programme, I hope that over the next four years we will try to achieve a balance in our work so that we do not get totally taken up by local government issues at the expense of transport ones, or the other way round.

**The Convener:** I take both those points on board—we should endeavour to cover the whole remit and it would be perfectly appropriate to seek a briefing on local government finance.

**Michael McMahon:** A look at the work load of the previous Local Government Committee shows that it was engaged with local authorities before it dealt with the Local Government in Scotland Bill. There was a civic participation event and the committee made a point of visiting many local authorities, familiarising itself with the issues that they faced and making contact with the people involved at that level. We could start to think about re-engaging in that way, so that we build up a rapport with our colleagues in local government and establish a relationship with them as soon as possible.

14:30

**The Convener:** I had already thought about that and discussed it with the clerk. Much of the Local Government Committee's work in the first session involved strong engagement with local government. In our consideration of the draft Local Governance (Scotland) Bill, it will be essential that we meet local government representatives as often as we can to hear what they have to say. It would be useful to develop a programme that gives all members the opportunity to hear the wide

variety of views that exist in local government in advance of our detailed consideration of the bill.

**Iain Smith:** I look forward to reading the work of the poor clerk or member of SPICe who has to produce a guide to local government finance on one sheet of A4 that makes the subject understandable. I have been involved in considering local government finance since 1982 and I still do not understand it fully, but that might just be me.

The suggestion of an away day is valuable, as it would allow those of us who are more familiar with local government to get up to speed on transport issues. At that event, it would also be useful to have some formal or informal contact with senior representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, both at councillor and official level, on a cross-party basis. Building links with the new officers at COSLA would be helpful.

**The Convener:** No other member wishes to comment on the legacy paper, but we have probably got enough material for an away week. We will do the best that we can with the suggestions, which were all valid. Although we will not be able to address them all in the SPICe briefing, we will try to cover everything at the away day. Do members agree to hold next week's SPICe briefing in private?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**David Mundell:** Are you proposing that we meet next week?

**The Convener:** Yes. We have a statutory instrument to consider and next week is the latest that we can deal with it. Given that we will have to meet next week, I propose that we hold the SPICe briefing at the same time. We could meet two weeks running, but it would be more effective to combine consideration of the subordinate legislation and the SPICe briefing in a single meeting.

Do members agree that we should try to organise an away day for the last week before the end of the summer recess? The clerk will liaise with members to find out which days are problematic. As no members of the committee are from the Highlands and Islands, I suggest that a location in central Scotland would be most appropriate. Is that agreed?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**David Mundell:** In my initial declaration, I should have declared that I am a member of the Scottish board of the National Playing Fields Association, as that is relevant to local government.

**The Convener:** Thank you for adding that to the public record.

**Paul Martin:** I would like to add that I am a member of Amicus, the trade union, although I am not sure whether that is relevant.

**The Convener:** I think that that falls under the miscellaneous section of the register of interests, which means that declaration is optional. However, it is fine to put it on the record.

Members will receive the papers for next week's meeting in due course. I encourage everyone to provide all their contact details, so that the clerks can contact them with information that is relevant to the committee's work. Researchers' contact details should be included, as well as information about where you want documents to be sent. That will help to ensure that communications work as effectively as possible.

I thank members for their attendance.

*Meeting closed at 14:34.*



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