

# **PROCEDURES COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 22 June 1999  
(*Afternoon*)

Meeting 1

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## THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE:

\*Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

\*Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

\*Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)

\*Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab)

\*Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

\*Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

\*Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con)

\*attended

## COMMITTEE CLERK:

John Patterson

## SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK:

Lee Bridges

## ASSISTANT CLERK:

Jim Johnston



# Scottish Parliament

## Procedures Committee

*Tuesday 22 June 1999*

*(Afternoon)*

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

**Donald Gorrie (Oldest Member of the Committee):** I welcome the members of the committee, all of whom are present.

The officials told me that, as the oldest member, I must preside over the first two items on the agenda. If any of you read, as I do, PG Wodehouse's humorous golfing stories, you will know that the oldest member is the club bore and is of great antiquity and thoroughly geriatric. I am, however, allowed only two items, so I hope that I will not qualify in that way.

### Interests

**Donald Gorrie:** The first thing that I must do is enable all members to declare any interests that are relevant to the committee. I have a sparse register of interests; my membership of the Westminster Parliament, by which I am paid, presumably might bias me in matters of procedure in the Scottish Parliament, but I do not think that it will. Other than that, I have no relevant interests to register.

I invite members to say for the record whether they have any interests to declare.

**Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con):** I was caught up in the no, no campaign, so my declaration of interests form says no, no; no, no; no, no. I have no interests that are relevant, other than my salary.

**Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab):** I have no relevant interests that I am aware of.

**Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** I have no relevant interests of which I am aware.

**Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** It is very boring, but I have no interests to declare that I am aware of.

**Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** This is five in a row, I am afraid. I have no interests to declare that I can think of now.

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I make six in a row in terms of the declaration of interests as registered, but as a member of the Parliamentary Bureau I have an interest in ensuring that the committee operates in such a

way as to make the work of the Parliament more effective. That is one of the reasons why I am here.

**Donald Gorrie:** We seem to have a clean bill of health.

### Convener

**Donald Gorrie:** Members will know that Parliament has voted that the convener of this committee should be a representative of the Scottish Conservative party. Bearing that in mind, may I ask for a proposal?

**Michael Russell:** I propose Murray Tosh, despite his being a member of the no, no campaign. I am sure that he will show that he has put that dishonourable past behind him. He was one of my opponents in Cunninghame South, which is fast becoming an infamous constituency in this Parliament. He was, however, one of the less successful candidates.

**Donald Gorrie:** Is that agreed to by everyone?

**Members:** Yes.

*Mr Murray Tosh was elected convener by acclamation.*

**Donald Gorrie:** I have much pleasure in exchanging places with Murray Tosh and in wishing him the best during his tenure as convener of this committee.

**The Convener (Mr Murray Tosh):** Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I hope that we will all subscribe to the sentiments of Mike Russell and that we are all committed to making the Parliament work. This committee's job will be to oil the wheels and to ensure that the Parliament can operate effectively in the interests of Government legislation and of individual members and their constituents.

### Remit

**The Convener:** The clerk to the committee has provided a number of papers that we will want to look at relating to the committee's remit and the areas of activity that we will cover.

I do not think that we should be too formal. There are only seven of us and I have noticed that one or two members in the chamber have been Jim-ing and Alex-ing each other. I hope that we will agree that we can operate using names rather than titles. We should use first names and I would like to think that the support staff would come into that as well, so that we can develop a proper and sensible working relationship. If members want to remove their jackets and so on because of the rather warm lights that we have, that would be eminently sensible.

This afternoon, we should agree on an approach to the standing orders and select a number of areas on which we would like the support staff to concentrate during the summer. I have no view on whether it would be appropriate to have any meetings between now and the resumption of Parliament. We can discuss that later on.

Members all have the paper that contains the remit for the Procedures Committee and topics for further briefing. I do not want members to speak to the paper or go through it line by line, but I wondered whether anybody had anything that they wanted to raise. The paper gives the number of members of the committee, the membership, the duration of the convenership and so on. Does any member wish clarification or a ruling on that?

**Michael Russell:** I do not want clarification or a ruling. The clerks have laid out particularly well the question of the standing orders, which is the key initial issue for the committee to consider. The standing orders will continue to operate until we decide to take any other action. The three actions that are outlined in the paper are interesting. It is tempting to go for the first and to make do with the standing orders while we take our time reviewing them. However, some fairly urgent matters are being referred to parliamentary staff. Clerks are compiling a huge list of possible difficulties with the standing orders and, every week, the Parliamentary Bureau notes items that require change or clarification. There was discussion about one such item today.

In such circumstances, it would be useful to have a review of the standing orders—even a gallop through them—to identify the parts that are causing the most problems before we propose the standing orders to the Parliament. That would give us ideas on changing them in the short term before we conduct a more leisurely review of all the standing orders, and might be an acceptable way to move forward.

It would not impede the Parliament if we did not lay the standing orders for formal approval at this stage, but it would give us the opportunity to change some things that might present us with difficulties in going about our business.

**The Convener:** As I understand it, there is no limit to the number of bites that we can have at this cherry. If we identify a number of issues before the recess that can be acted on in the autumn, there is no reason why we should not address other issues as they arise. It would be useful to proceed on an incremental basis, having comprehensively examined the standing orders.

Mike jumped ahead to the “Initiating Discussion” paper, in which three options were outlined. Are you saying, Mike, that the strategic objective should be the third of the options but that in the

interim, because certain matters are urgent, we should dip into the second option and pick them out?

**Michael Russell:** I am talking about modifying the second option by setting a target of a number of early changes, and some more considered changes. We should accept that the process has to be completed by 6 May 2000.

**The Convener:** Is that acceptable to members of the committee?

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** We should learn as we go. Until the committees have had a good run at things and a bill has been through Parliament, we will not know all the snags. What Mike Russell says is sensible: we should alter the things that are clearly wrong and have a more mature look when we have had more experience.

**Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** I agree with Mr Russell as well. He mentioned that issues had come up in the Parliamentary Bureau, but a number of issues have also arisen in the chamber which should be referred to the Procedures Committee because of standing orders implications. Annex C of the paper that contains the remit for the Procedures Committee details some of the points that have come up, but I assume that it is not an exhaustive list. Is there a complete list of every problem that has arisen so far?

**The Convener:** The difficulty is that other committees that met today might have discovered further problems and, as the process is teased out, more will arise. Annex C is indicative rather than definitive.

**Janis Hughes:** Is there a formal mechanism by which such problems can be noted and brought to our attention?

**The Convener:** That is a good question. I am assured that the clerks to the several committees, as well as the chamber clerks, will pass things sideways. For discussion after the recess, we want a comprehensive report of all the points that are known by then.

**Michael Russell:** There are many consumers of standing orders; members are not the only ones. Other consumers include the clerking staff and the public. One of the purposes of standing orders is to make the Parliament understandable and transparent. To work out where problems are occurring now, we must trawl all those consumers. The views of clerks throughout the Parliament, who have had difficulties, must be trawled even on tiny matters such as the business bulletin in which certain things are prescribed.

There must be a trawl of the groups and individuals in the Parliament, but thought should

also be given to how the standing orders make business appear. For example, the Parliamentary Bureau has decided to ask members who want to ask questions at open question time to read their questions aloud. That is not what happens at Westminster; there, the question number is read out. We should ensure that standing orders allow more transparency in the operation of the Parliament. To do that, we must think creatively about how we can get the opinion of those who come to watch what is going on. Perhaps we should issue a questionnaire to the gallery four or five times, to find out whether people understand what is taking place.

**The Convener:** I have a note from the clerk, which says that we cannot change anything until the whole set of standing orders has been adopted. That is not what I understood from the guidelines that we were given. I thought that we could make changes while operating under the provisional standing orders. I have been advised that the Parliament would have to adopt the standing orders before it could make changes.

**Michael Russell:** We could adopt the standing orders on a Monday and lodge amendments to them the next day; the two could be contiguous. The problem is, in that sense, a technical matter.

**Mr Kerr:** We should consider the hot spots that have already arisen and make changes as quickly as possible, although that would not give us the finished item. Those changes could be accepted by the Parliament, and the next day we could start again on more difficult or contentious issues, for which more consultation might be required. We should hit the hot spots that we have already encountered in the chamber and elsewhere.

**Michael Russell:** There might be resistance from groups or individuals if we asked members to adopt the standing orders, which many regard as flawed in places, and then said that we would make changes. We must propose some changes first, so that members realise that change is coming, rather than say that we will make those changes and then wait for a while.

**The Convener:** Would it be appropriate for us, after the recess, to recommend that Parliament should adopt the standing orders and then amend them to take into account the issues that have arisen so far, making it clear that those changes would be responses to what have been called the hot spots—immediate difficulties—and that we would move as quickly as possible to redefine the standing orders, so that the Scottish Parliament had its own standing orders at the earliest date?

**Mr Kerr:** Is there no option to get our first bite in by that time? Instead of the standing orders being adopted, can the amended standing orders go before the chamber?

**Michael Russell:** We can do that if we do not propose the adoption of the standing orders for some time—which we do not have to do.

**The Convener:** I am advised that it would be inappropriate to operate under shadow standing orders, but I find that difficult to understand. We have been operating under shadow standing orders for the past month, and I am not sure why we could not continue to do so.

**Michael Russell:** One of our options is to be quite open about it and to ask the Parliament whether we have to adopt the standing orders, given that all of us want to change certain things as soon as possible.

The committee would be declaring the right intention if it were to pause in September or October rather than, in October, immediately pointing out the hot spots in the standing orders on which we are concentrating as part of the process.

14:30

**Gordon Jackson:** It might not make any difference, but that would look more serious and give a better impression if we are to change the standing orders.

**Michael Russell:** Yes.

**Gordon Jackson:** I do not suppose that it would make any difference whether we changed the standing orders now or later.

**Mr Kerr:** Does that answer the question whether we can put in a revised set of standing orders first? Rather than adopting the shadow standing orders, which contain some holes that need to be addressed, and then going back, after they have been adopted, and proposing more changes, could we have a discussion over the recess and into the early part of the period after the recess about the obvious areas for improvement in the current standing orders, and submit that as our first goal?

As long as we can tackle the obvious problem areas, consult on time and calm the political groups and officials in regard to what we are doing, we can hit the ground running. We can present our proposals by comparing them with the existing ones. If our proposals are approved, we can explain that we still have a wee bit to do on them, but that we will come back in due course.

**The Convener:** It almost becomes a matter of labels, but if we accept the present standing orders and make emergency adjustments, they are not really our standing orders; they are still the original ones.

**Mr Kerr:** Our suggestions would be proposals for change.

**Janis Hughes:** The Parliament has been meeting for a time, and justifiably we have identified problems with the standing orders, some of which are documented. It would be good if we could describe some of those problems and our proposals for dealing with them; we could then work on other areas as they arise. It would be difficult for us to justify ratifying the current standing orders. Given that so many problems have already been identified, we should work on them.

**Michael Russell:** Janis and Gordon are right—it is a presentational issue. If it is ruled that we have to approve the shadow standing orders in early September, we can do so. In a presentational sense, it shows a more serious intention to change things if we delay a month or so, ask the Parliament to approve the shadow standing orders and present half a dozen amendments that will make them work better, and then go away for the next six months to produce a new set of standing orders.

**The Convener:** We would need to have a substantive meeting of the committee very soon after the summer recess to agree on our recommended changes, so that we could take them to the Parliament as quickly as possible thereafter.

**Michael Russell:** In the meantime, as Janis says, some of those issues are identified in annex C. The staff could trawl members and the groups, look at the issue of public perception and come back with a complete list of suggestions, as well as suggestions on the most urgent matters. I suspect that question time is one of the areas where there is most concern at the moment, in the sense that it is flat and does not represent a real exchange of views.

There are other urgent matters, such as statements, which are not considered sexy in that sense and are impeding us a little. There is no clarity in the standing orders on what a statement is in parliamentary terms. That is important, because our business might become overburdened with statements without debate. The right way to deal with the matter would be to get a list of all the issues to date and highlight half a dozen or so on which we can do some substantive work in September and early October, with a view to taking matters further in October.

**Gordon Jackson:** Mr Russell is envisaging that we suggest a list of the urgent changes on the same day as we present the standing orders. What would be the mechanics of drawing up that list? Would a few people do it?

**Michael Russell:** It would be a series of amendments.

**Gordon Jackson:** I mean in the committee—the

mechanics of our drawing up the list.

**Michael Russell:** We would look at amendments to the standing orders that had been prepared by the clerks and discuss whether they met the practical objectives. Gordon has far more experience of that than I have, but it is a legislative process whereby we would look at drafts and see whether they reflected our objectives.

On question time, it is a simple matter of whether we have got the balance right and whether the standing orders are too restrictive. We could all bring suggestions to the meeting on how it should work, which could be drafted in terms of a new amendment to the standing orders, which we could consider.

**The Convener:** We will have to have another meeting before the recess, if it is at all possible. We have just been advised that there are more points to be addressed. We need another report from the clerks to indicate comprehensively the difficulties that have been encountered to date, so that we can give them guidance about the work that we want to be done over the summer. We will also have to discuss whether we want to meet during the summer to review any of that work or whether we want to create another mechanism to allow us to monitor what is being done. In the first instance, we need to agree that we want a brief meeting before the recess to allow us to review the points and issues that we have identified and to give guidance on prioritisation.

To summarise what we have already agreed: at some point in the autumn we will adopt the present standing orders; at the same time we will change the hot spots; and we will indicate that that is a piece of emergency surgery and that we will continue to work on producing a comprehensive, revised set of standing orders in order to meet the deadline. Following Donald's point, we will also review the operation of the committees and the legislative process to ensure that we are examining the work of the Parliament in the round.

**Mr Kerr:** Will it be possible for the report that we receive at the next meeting, which might be sooner than most of us thought—that is fine and good—to contain not just the areas of concern that have been raised through the trawl, but suggested options for action? For example, annex C says that provision should be made for the candidates for Presiding Officer to be allowed to make an election address to the Parliament. That seems to me to be fairly non-contentious, and if we put in some parameters, we might well agree on that. If we had some options before us, our next meeting could be more fleshed out.

**The Convener:** In identifying the hot spots, we do not necessarily have to examine the things that have been most difficult so far, but we must



consider the difficulties that are likely to be continuing ones—presumably, we will not reappoint a Presiding Officer for some time. There were difficulties surrounding the selection of the Parliamentary Bureau, and we must put that right before the Parliament needs to revisit those decisions. However, we need to focus on the more immediate operational issues.

**Mr Kerr:** Perhaps that was a bad example to pick; if a hot spot is identified, I am asking whether we will be given suggestions for resolving it that we might consider. Rather than having a list of problems, perhaps we can have a list of potential solutions.

**Michael Russell:** Yes.

**Gordon Jackson:** What would be the mechanics of that?

**Michael Russell:** It is not a one-way process; we can also make suggestions. For example, the list in annex C includes a question about the length of interventions during members' allocated time for speeches. That appears to be a minor matter, but it has caused much concern. It would be helpful if there were to be a provision for that in the standing orders; otherwise it will remain a matter of concern.

Barring the Clapham omnibus—or rather, some other omnibus—running down the entire corporate body in the next six months, we do not need to address immediately the question whether there should be separate votes for the election of the corporate body. However, we will need to address the question of interventions because it is an on-going issue that irritates. We can prioritise and make suggestions. There must be flexibility for interventions in speeches. We must also consider whether interventions should be taken during summing up. That is not allowed in normal parliamentary debating procedure, but it has been allowed in this Parliament and there has been a move to change that. We should clarify the issue and say whether such interventions are allowed.

**The Convener:** We understand what we intend to do and we must leave it to the clerks to find an opening in next week's busy programme in which we can have a meeting to identify the difficulties that have been encountered so far.

Moving on from that, we need to discuss how we will monitor the work that is to be done over the summer. At the briefing, it was suggested that certain items could be delegated to me. I do not know if I am entirely comfortable with that, although I am conscious of the difficulties that we will face if we hold committee meetings during the recess when members will have holidays, constituency duties and an enormous range of other commitments. Do members have any views on the matter? I do not want to be democratic

about it.

**Michael Russell:** Which matters would be delegated to you?

**The Convener:** Essentially, it would be for me to agree to an on-going work programme for the clerks.

**Michael Russell:** I cannot see much difficulty with that.

**Mr Kerr:** Given what we have just said about what we need to do, the brief is there, and it would be for you to monitor that and to keep in touch by the usual methods.

**Michael Russell:** As a leading advocate for the new politics, I am sure that you will want to consult with the parties to ensure that they are happy. I am certain that we would trust you to do that—consensually.

**The Convener:** If the committee were happy to proceed on that basis, it would help to streamline the work of the staff.

Do we want to go through any of the other areas? The inescapable tasks, such as the annual report, speak for themselves and we have resolved what we will do about the standing orders. There are areas beyond that where members may wish to lay down markers now, areas such as guidance procedures in other Parliaments and procedural matters relating to committee-initiated work.

**Michael Russell:** There are a number of interesting issues, particularly in the area of best practice in other Parliaments. I have lost count of the number of times that ministers have told me that we do not have to do things in the same way as they are done at Westminster, the Welsh Assembly or anywhere else. While that is true, we could usefully examine Parliaments that work well and, in particular, that have public support.

Anyone who takes a lesson out of the voting figures of the Scottish Parliament elections, let alone the European Parliament elections, must be mindful of the fact that the public does not appear to have a great deal of interest in Parliaments and parliamentarians. It is right for the Procedures Committee to ask whether the ways in which we work, and, dare I say, the manner in which we conduct ourselves—although that might open a sore that we had better keep closed—make the Parliament more accessible, open, democratic and publicly supported and encourage people's interest in politics. It would be interesting to examine those issues during the year in order to establish that the Procedures Committee is not as dry as dust, but rather comes up with new ideas and new initiatives that could help the Parliament.

**The Convener:** I understand that the

Westminster Parliament's procedures people would be interested and willing to meet us, and that is something that we should explore. The other possibility is to try to communicate with other Parliaments that are within reasonable travelling distance. Alternatively, we might be in a position to use proper modern communications technology, such as videoconferencing, to take the views of other Parliaments. I am sure that it makes sense to learn from the experience of others.

I would like us to seek advice and experience from those Parliaments around the world that have attempted some of the work that we are considering, such as building in public consultation and participation—and here we enter a grey area, as I do not know which Parliaments have done so. If there are role models and examples out there, we need to find them and learn from them, so that we can implement their ideas.

There is a great danger that this committee will focus too much on the work of the Parliament and on our own business. It is up to us to set the tone for many of the Parliament's other committees. We could become so focused on our own activities that we neglect to do the tour and the public consultation. We should be asking councils what they do to involve their public in their decision-making processes and we should be trying to build a model where consultation and dialogue can be built into the parliamentary process. I would like this committee to set a good example in those areas. Cross-work with other Parliaments and with local authorities would be very useful.

Do the clerks have any information about operational procedures in other Parliaments? Are there any ideas about where we might go for such guidance? We will think about that and do a wee bit of research.

**Michael Russell:** It would be useful to have a paper on the possibility of examining models elsewhere for best practice in consultation, openness and public support for Parliaments, which could advise us about how we should inquire into this issue.

**Donald Gorrie:** May I make a suggestion along the same lines? Some of our main customers, if that is the right expression, are pressure groups of all sorts. They include commercial lobbyists—about whom all of us have slight question marks, although they are a necessary part of the system—and the do-gooding bodies that campaign on a specific issue: helping elderly people, the disabled, young people or whatever.

14:45

It would be helpful to have one or more meeting with representatives of those groups to find out if they have ideas on how best they can present

their points of view to committees. That does not mean that we have to accept everything that they tell us, but we should have an efficient mechanism. They are people with an agenda that they wish to push in Parliament. There should at least be a reasonable system that allows them to do that, and which enables us to weigh up how much of their agenda we wish to accept. Meeting pressure groups and lobbying groups of different sorts in the autumn—here, and perhaps in one or two other cities to show that we are not an Edinburgh-centric organisation—might produce some interesting ideas.

**The Convener:** We would need to provide a report for a range of organisations to ask them to come forward with their views. Presumably the clerks can give some thought to that and establish a consultees register.

We want to be inclusive. The clerks are identifying problems and we have identified some problems. Should we ask all members of the Parliament about the difficulties that they have encountered in the operation of their duties? If we did that with a tight time scale for responses, we would be in a position to feed back the responses into our subsequent meetings.

**Michael Russell:** That is an excellent idea. Members should be asked their views, electronically if possible.

**The Convener:** As long as there are paper systems for those who are not quite as adept as Mr Russell—I will use the formal title on this occasion—at the electronic means of working.

**Mr Kerr:** Would that trawl include the party business managers, or whatever the title is of the whips?

**The Convener:** I think that we would ask all members.

**Michael Russell:** Andy, we are MSPs too. We would be asked.

**Mr Kerr:** Business managers have to deal with different aspects of business. They deal with how groups organise in the chamber, as opposed to individuals.

**Michael Russell:** All individuals should be asked, but the groups should have a special request to consult.

**Mr Kerr:** Did Mr Russell say that business managers were human beings as well as MSPs?

**Michael Russell:** I would not press it that far.

**The Convener:** We are not simply speaking to members as members: MSPs who have a managerial function should contribute input from that standpoint as well, because we all have our work to do and we must make sure that it is done

in the best way possible.

The clerks have asked also that we examine the rota of meetings. They wonder whether we feel that, once the Parliament is up and running after the recess, we want to meet fortnightly to monitor the on-going work, which, as all members will know, is the suggestion in the paper. I see heads nodding, so I take it that we agree that that is an appropriate way for us to proceed, at least at the outset. Obviously, we can meet less or more frequently as we identify the work load.

**Janis Hughes:** That sounds reasonable. We are in a wait-and-see situation in which we do not know what our work load will be until we get started, so meeting fortnightly is realistic—with the caveat that we reserve the right to increase or decrease the frequency of meetings as necessary.

**The Convener:** Another item that occurs to me, and which Mike has indicated concern about, is question time and the way that we handle ministerial statements. The clerks will have noted that concern.

Do committee members wish anything else to be given some early thought? Obviously, we will return to this issue next week when we have looked at all the other difficulties, but I am sure that the clerks are champing at the bit to get working on those things.

**Mr Paterson:** Does that wide-ranging request include the electronics that we have to operate?

**The Convener:** That is pertinent. Would you flesh out that comment?

**Mr Paterson:** The electronics in the voting system are 10 years too old. The system does not allow us to see whether we have voted or not if, for example, we get interrupted. I find the system to be unsophisticated. A lot could be done to improve it. It would be advantageous if we had a paper on the voting system and came up with methods of making minor changes, for example, putting another light on the system.

**Michael Russell:** I understand that there is an enormous technical difficulty about putting another light on the system: it will absorb the output of three more power stations or something. I cannot fully understand it. Something that has been discussed, and which this committee might influence as no action has been taken on it as yet, is putting an electronic board, or possibly two, in the chamber. It could do a number of things: show whether people have voted; show the list of speakers, which people are going to be called to speak; give the duration. All those things are possible without too much difficulty. An early examination of the electronic development possibilities for the chamber might be useful. The system we have is very functional but it is not easy

to understand and mistakes are being made.

**Gordon Jackson:** I wish that there was something that told me how I had voted because I have this paranoia that I am going to discover that I voted the wrong way—and that I am not going to discover that I have pressed the wrong button for two days. I would quite like to know—

**Michael Russell:** I will not be uncharitable and say that is something to do with new Labour.

**The Convener:** It is a general problem. Last week, one of our members discovered that he had not voted. We assume that the card was not inserted in the correct way or something like that, but he did not know until afterwards. That is intolerable. On a close vote something like that could be crucial.

**Michael Russell:** Apparently there would be no great difficulty in putting up a board and connecting it to the system and being flexible. That is something that we should look at fairly urgently because, if it is going to be done, the best time would be during the recess.

**Mr Paterson:** It is the lack of a visual application that is the real problem—we are left in the dark all the time. If we had something visual it would help; whether it was one board, two or four would make no difference.

**The Convener:** I ask the clerks to consider whether these are strictly standing orders issues or whether they are sufficiently related to standing orders to be allowable.

Let us now take the paper that Mr Gorrie has circulated to committee members.

**Donald Gorrie:** I would like the committee to ask the clerking team to consider whether my concern about time is justified. The proposals that the consultative steering group's report made on the number of hours in the day and the number of weeks of the year that the Parliament would be in session will not give us enough hours either for debate in the chamber or for committees. Members may have different views on how to expand the time available and I have some ideas, but I did not want to unload on the committee my thoughts on how to improve things.

I feel that it is an issue worth looking at and, if other members agree, we could, early in the autumn, have a report on whether there is likely to be enough time. When we have bills and Opposition days and perhaps more time for questions, there is unlikely to be enough time adequately to debate important issues or for the committees to listen to people. Listening is a very time-consuming activity and committees may well need more hours than have been provided for so far.

**Mr Kerr:** We should wait for the figures on debating time and so on, but Mondays and Fridays are a valuable time in the constituencies for a lot of people. If we have late-night shopping, why should we not consider late-night politics? Could we have a session that continues in the evening on one night a week or every fortnight so that those members with families or with constituencies that are further away from Edinburgh than others could still participate fully?

**The Convener:** One of my colleagues suggested that idea last week and a number of members were not very sympathetic to it. I understand the principle of an evening in the week when people are here anyway. I also understand the importance of trying to keep Mondays and Fridays free so that constituency and other business can be attended to. I think that we should look at all of that. Donald has indicated that he has some ideas and suggestions and I think that we should invite him to flesh those out and bring them to us for consideration.

**Michael Russell:** We do not know whether this will be a problem or not—

**The Convener:** We need the figures.

**Michael Russell:**—but it is likely that it may be the case. There are, I think, 12 half days for committee business and 15 half days for non-Executive business, which is not a lot. There is quite a lot of space for Executive business. We may not even find out about that this autumn. As the committees have just been established, the 12 half days for committee business may be difficult to fill between now and next May because committees may not complete the work that they are doing early enough. Those committees that work fast may have a big advantage this year because there is not likely to be a great pressure on committee days. We may not find out for some time whether there is going to be pressure on committee days, so we should keep an eye on that issue.

I have some sympathy with the idea of evening meetings, but I also have a great deal of sympathy for those people who strongly believe—as I do—that this is a family-friendly Parliament. The moment that we start to move into meeting in the evenings it may become established as the norm. The typical pattern of a workaholic is to say that they will go into the office for half an hour and a year later they will be there every day, so we should be careful.

**The Convener:** I will take that as a true-life confession, Mike.

**Mr Paterson:** I come from a business background, where it is sometimes difficult to get out to see the customers often enough. I hate to think that we are going to be locked up in this

Parliament. We must get out to see people. I am worried about eating into the time for constituency business on Monday and Friday—perhaps we could eat into that time on one day. I agree with Andy that we must get out to schools, hospitals and other places. That is the real world and we should not get caught up in committees.

**The Convener:** I think that Donald's concern is that we must ensure that there is time for everything to be fully debated. We must remember that whatever we propose will have to be canvassed with all our colleagues, because every member of the Parliament will have a view on this issue. We must reach a balance to ensure that the Parliament has time to attend to Opposition business, to questioning, to legislative business and to all the other business that it has to juggle.

That gives rise to the issue of the rate at which we do the work of reviewing standing orders. It has become clear from our discussion that there are some areas in which we will not be able to envisage the nature of the end product until we are well through the session. We will not know how committees work and how legislation works until we are well on in the session, but we cannot leave the job of drawing up standing orders to the last minute. We must ask the clerks to prioritise the rate at which we draw up the standing orders to identify the parts of the standing orders in which there are few difficulties. We could quickly review those and get the easy bits out of the way to give us the maximum time to monitor the operation of the Parliament through a session. We have until May of next year to complete this task. I do not want it to drag on unnecessarily, but I do not want it to be a rushed job either. All the substantive changes that we consider must be based on the experience and wisdom that we have accumulated during the year's work. I understand that the clerks feel that they could proceed on that.

We have gone through all the points that I wanted to consider. Everyone seems to be happy that we have completed all the initial business.

Will the clerk team leader, Mr Patterson, identify the members of staff to the committee so that we know who everyone is for future reference? Lee Bridges is the senior assistant clerk, Jim Johnston is the assistant clerk, Robin Smith is an administrative support staffer and Sharon Murray is an administrative support staffer.

The other two gentlemen at the table are members of the official report, and they are anonymous, are they?

**Michael Russell:** They do not have time to have names, they just write.

**The Convener:** The two official reporters are Cameron Smith and Ian Methven.

**Michael Russell:** They will have to write that down now.

**The Convener:** The official reporters sent will vary, so we need not worry too much about getting to know them, but we thank them very much for attending and look forward to reading the account of proceedings.

I will give members a final opportunity to raise any other matters.

**Donald Gorrie:** One of the points that perplexes me about this committee—which I asked to be a member of and am enthusiastic about—is the frontier between it and the Parliamentary Bureau, of which Mr Russell is also a member. Could someone give me a one-minute tutorial on the difference between us deciding the procedures and the Parliamentary Bureau deciding the day-to-day business and to inform us as to where those two functions meet?

**The Convener:** I sense that there are grey areas there that will evolve by work and by practice. It will not be a problem to make available a briefing note on the lines of demarcation. I am sure that we would all find that very helpful. [MEMBERS: "Yes."] That is agreed.

**Michael Russell:** Will we be notified of a time for a meeting next week?

**The Convener:** That is the intention, but the clerks will have to consider it in the light of the work of the Parliament next week.

Thank you for your attendance.

*Meeting closed at 15:01.*



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