

PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 29 June 1999
(*Afternoon*)

Meeting 2

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CONVENER :

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS :

*Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)

*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)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS ALSO ATTENDED :

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe)

The Deputy Minister for Parliament (Iain Smith)

COMMITTEE CLERK:

John Patterson

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK:

Lee Bridges

ASSISTANT CLERK:

Jim Johnston

Scottish Parliament

Procedures Committee

Tuesday 29 June 1999

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:15*]

The Convener (Mr Murray Tosh): It has just turned 2.15 pm, so I think that we will start. It appears that I have to read out the procedure for a fire action notice. I think that we will take this as read at subsequent meetings—if we are allowed to. If we find a fire when we are in the building, I am told that we should operate the nearest alarm or speak to a member of staff—presumably about the fire. On hearing the fire alarm, which is a ringing bell—I do not know whether there is a vibrating alternative; please do not minute that—we leave the committee room by the door. We are then to make our way out of the building, following the green running person fire evacuation signs. The green running person is from the “X-Files”, I believe. The chamber attendants will assist the evacuation. We all know that we should get out as quickly as possible; the more serious point is that we should go to the fire assembly point, which is in Parliament Square east. Do not stop to collect personal belongings, do not re-enter the building and do not use the lifts.

Apologies

The Convener: There are no apologies. I presume that Mike Russell is coming but that he is late.

Non-agenda Items

The Convener: I want to make some points that are not on the agenda, one of which concerns the minute from the previous meeting. It was restricted to the declaration of interests, the appointment of the convener and the remit of the committee. Donald Gorrie raised the valid point that he lodged a paper at that meeting, which, unlike other papers that are presented as official papers for the committee's business, is not on record. If a paper is lodged in that way, that should be minuted and recorded as part of the record of the discussion so that the record is complete.

I welcome our guest, Iain Smith, who has expressed an interest in the work of the committee. Although he is not a member, he would like to be present. He is welcome to participate in the committee's business. We will talk about the practicalities of that later in the meeting.

I should also say, because it is not on the agenda, that the Presiding Officer has called a meeting tomorrow to discuss procedures, to which the clerk and I have been invited. We will report to the Presiding Officer and his deputies on the committee's deliberations and will receive representations from them about the business that they think we should prioritise. It is right that, in our work, we should reflect on their opinions.

Before we get on to the substantive paper on issues that have been raised, we should be aware that we are not here to answer questions or to deal with the points that have been made; our remit is to identify the priorities for officials' work over the recess. I will suggest which points raised by members appear to be the most important.

Standing Orders

The Convener: That takes us to paper PR/99/2/1 on standing orders issues to date. The report details what was done, following the initial meeting last week, to invite comments from officials and members. It makes the point that the time for that was limited, and it accepts that further points and representations will inevitably be made. This was intended not to be a closed procedure, but to establish an initial profile of points.

The substantive business is in the annex, which contains three pages of issues that have arisen. Members should also have received, either with the agenda or subsequently, papers from Michael Russell MSP and Phil Gallie MSP. There is also a letter from Lord James Douglas-Hamilton MSP, which makes some points on behalf of the Conservative group. Those have been reflected in the annex—we think that all the points have been picked up there. The clerk and I spent about an hour this morning going through those points, and we are keen that we do not simply replicate that discussion. I thought that it would be helpful if I rattled through the annex and the committee indicated what it thought. The annex is designed not to make any substantive decisions but to help us to identify priorities for options that will be brought to us later.

We felt that we could identify a number of headings, which would allow prioritisation of work, and that the conduct of debates and all the points on speaking—times, interventions and notification—could be looked at as a set of generic issues, as that is how we have experienced them.

We felt that a series of points on voting could be looked at together. Those points include the time given, the mechanical systems, when the vote should take place and the feedback—or lack of it—on whether one had voted. We felt that it was not clear whether some issues of timetabling and notice—for example, what is in the bulletin and

when the bulletin should appear—should be specified as standing orders issues. Those are perhaps procedural matters that should not be overspecific, but officials should look at that aspect of the business and report back to us about how we could streamline it.

Question time seems, from what we have read in the press, to be a matter of concern to members, ministers and the Presiding Officer. We felt that the issue should be examined. We need a more sharply focused questioning session that is meaningful to all the participants.

We felt that there was an issue about chairmanship. That is a delicate area because chairmanship is a separate yet related issue. The presiding officers have powers and an important relationship to the Parliament. It is important that we find out how they think that meetings can be sharpened up. They may want to look at issues such as consistency and clarity. We may then reach agreement on which matters should be written into the standing orders and on which matters they should be consistent and give guidance.

Those are the main priorities that we identified. Would it help if I went through each one in turn so that we can decide which ones should be put on the back burner?

Members: Yes.

The Convener: We felt that discussion on the first items, on rule 2.2, would be more appropriate in the longer term than is possible in the current time scale. We will not know the balance between the chamber and the committees until we have more experience of the committees. Those are important matters, but we feel that they are not urgent.

We felt that rule 3.7 could be left because we will not have to revisit it until the beginning of the next Parliament. I will ask Mike to say a bit more about his comment—we think that the comment came from Mike—on rule 5.1, because we wondered whether things had moved on.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): It was a warning shot, more than anything else. The range was found, so I would not have thought that it was a matter for standing orders at this stage. It might become so if there was a general feeling that the bureau was unable to operate. Other issues may be wrapped up in this, such as what constitutes a statement and how statements should be made, but I would not have thought that that needs to be pursued at this stage.

The Convener: We thought that statements could be looked at in the context of questions, because there is an ambiguity about whether statements are followed by debates or by

questions. That would be a useful way to wrap the subject up, because it is becoming confusing.

We felt that rule 5.9.2(f) could be looked at under the general heading of timetabling. Rule 7.2.2 could be taken in the context of the conduct of debates and speaking.

Michael Russell: That rule comes under speaking?

The Convener: Yes, because it deals with speaking times.

Michael Russell: It also relates to chairmanship because, as I understand it, in the briefing for the Presiding Officer, times are allocated in terms of opening and closing debates and then altered according to the number of subsidiary speakers who come forward. That ties in with the question of statements, because it relates to the amount of time given to non-Executive party spokesmen to question a minister.

The Convener: Many of these points relate to the time that it takes to develop an argument and the time that should be allocated for debate, all of which come under the generic heading of speaking. That is a valid point, at which the officials will look; they will give us options on it at the end of the recess.

We felt that the comment on rule 8.15 was not a priority because the issue that it concerns has not yet arisen; we will have to deal with it when it does arise. I presume that how motions for adjournment and closure are dealt with will depend on the time of day that they come. We felt that that was rather theoretical.

Rule 8.2 also relates to timetabling. We think that it is a matter more of streamlining business than for laying down in the standing orders. Officials will consider it and report back to us. Rule 8.5 is similar. These are some of the matters on which we will be making representations to the bureau rather than writing into the standing orders.

The same applies to rule 8.5.5. We felt that there was something in rule 8.6 that the business managers should look at again. We do not have a clear view about whether this is a big problem; we should pause for a few minutes to ascertain whether members have a view on it. The issue was raised by the clerks, but may reflect some of the practical difficulties. Mike may have encountered the problem when he looked at amendments to motions.

Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Can we have some clarification about what the clerks were saying?

Michael Russell: Does this not relate to the point of order that I made in the debate on the amendment that would have deleted two names

from the ministerial list? I argued that an amendment could delete only one name from the list. Iain Smith was the beneficiary, because we did not want to delete his name. The issue will arise only in the formal nomination of ministers, but there was an argument with the Presiding Officer. One should not be able to lodge an amendment that says, "Delete A, B and C", because it is difficult to vote on them individually in those circumstances.

The Convener: We will suggest that that is not a priority before October and that we leave it on the back burner.

We felt that the comment on rule 8.6.1 was not a serious problem for members—we felt that they knew which motion or amendment they were speaking to when they were speaking—and that we did not need to address it with any urgency.

The next series of points relate to voting issues: when voting should take place, whether there should be any reruns of votes and how points of order during votes should be handled. We felt that a report on the generic category of voting procedures could encompass all the points, some of which are more substantive than others.

14:30

Michael Russell: On the question of having decision times at different times of the day, there is already provision in the standing orders for decision time to be moved on a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau. There have, however, been complaints; for example, some of the evening newspaper editors said that it was unreasonable that they could not report the result of the debate on Holyrood because the decision did not take place until 5 pm. Of all these questions, that is one of the most urgent. Some debates will last half the morning, after which members will leave the chamber and not come back until 5 pm. That is worth debating.

The Convener: Those are issues that the report will address; at that stage, the committee will take a view on the options. We are trying not to pre-empt the committee's report, which will be issued at the end of the recess, but I agree that it is an important issue.

Michael Russell: I thought that you were trying to prioritise some of the issues.

The Convener: Yes, and we should, as a priority, look at the whole issue of voting.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): The point in the annex about rule 8.6.1 in the standing orders can be dealt with without any change to the standing orders—the official report could insert the appropriate words and print the amendment.

The Convener: That point can be noted and put to the editor of the official report as a practical suggestion.

The point about ambiguity in rule 13.2.1 is important and touches on the point that we made a moment ago. It is not clear what should happen after a ministerial statement, and we must look at that in the context of questioning. Will it be a question time or a debate? Can the Parliament decide on the spot? Those are the sorts of options that must be looked at.

The clerk and I did not feel that there was any particular need to deal with the issue of admissibility of questions. It was felt that common sense would work that out in the fullness of time.

The answer to the question about rule 13.5 was fairly obvious—that it was not, perhaps, appropriate for standing orders to be changed at this stage. That is also something that is likely to work itself out in the fullness of time.

Rules 13.5, 13.6 and 13.7 relate to question time. We felt that all the issues raised needed exploration. Urgent questions, notice of questions, the role of the First Minister in question time and ministers' question times are all substantive issues that merit investigation.

Mr McCabe has joined us. Do you wish to sit at the table as part of the committee?

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): There are not enough seats, so I will sit here.

The Convener: You are welcome to do so should you wish to. Do you require papers?

Mr McCabe: No, I have them.

The Convener: The press, the public, the politicians, the Presiding Officer and, apparently, the First Minister have all identified questions as a difficult area that has been exposed by the early workings of the Parliament. This is a priority issue that we should address at the earliest opportunity.

We felt that the matters raised by the editor of the official report on rules 16.2.1 and 16.2.3 were not necessarily urgent.

Clearly, many committee issues will arise as committees sit. We will be much clearer about how committees work and should work when we have had more experience of them. We felt that there could be a problem with rule 9.21. We are not clear what might crop up as an emergency bill, but we agreed this morning that the Parliament would be rather embarrassed if it had to deal with an emergency bill and found that its procedures were not up to it. That should be looked at fairly urgently after the recess.

The general issues in the briefing paper do not

refer to specific details of the standing orders. The Presiding Officer and his deputies could be asked to define absolutely and clearly the point about interventions; that need not be included in standing orders. The standing orders can, however, be examined in the context of issues relating to debating and speaking. Members may not agree with that opinion. The clerk and I thought that it would be difficult to start making absolute specifications in the standing orders. We should start the process of examining the standing orders and that is what we are doing.

We felt that the questions about the need for definitive chamber procedures and the discretion allowed to the Presiding Officer could be referred to the Presiding Officer. At the moment, we are unclear how tightly we want chamber procedures to be defined in standing orders. This is an evolutionary process and there are issues that we would want the chamber to deal with as they arise. Some of the points in the briefing paper should perhaps be dealt with by the Presiding Officer rather than by the Procedures Committee, but to what extent that is the case may not become clear until more time has elapsed. We have not had the opportunity to fully test—there is a split infinitive—the standing orders, but that is what this process is for.

Some voting issues are worth examining, such as the clarity of announcements on voting times and—as there have been some criticisms of the equipment—the method of voting. It would be useful to discuss these issues with people who are familiar with the equipment and the ways in which it might be adapted to give feedback—for example, to tell the member whether his or her vote has been recorded. Our system is much tougher to run than the Westminster system, in which members get to follow their mates through a lobby for 15 minutes, which is not too hard. We have to make snap decisions here. A number of sources have asked whether it would be practical to have a display board.

There are speaking issues and the question of the running order. There is the question whether there should be notice of who will speak. Westminster would say no, but many of us have experience of speaking in forums in which the running order is known two or three speakers in advance, which gives time for preparation. Members may like to express a view on that.

Whether the standing orders or the Presiding Officer should regulate interventions remains to be seen. We have all heard very long interventions that turn out to be speeches. That is not fair to the member who has given way and it must be dealt with in one way or another.

The issue about papers for discussion in committee is a separate item on our agenda.

Concern has been raised about the efficacy of the voting system; we have touched on that.

The clerk and I felt that it was up to the Presiding Officer, or whichever of his deputies was holding the floor, whether interventions should be taken during summing up. We were not convinced that there should be a new rule, but that must be looked at in the overall context of debates.

Mr Kerr: Those points do not seem to belong to the same categories as the ones before. Will they fit back into what you said about the other issues?

The Convener: The idea is that the officers will look at those issues over the summer. They will come to a meeting which we will arrange for early in the autumn—some time in early September. We will then need time for the reports to be considered, for the views expressed in them to circulate and for feedback to be gathered. Mid-October would be the appropriate time by which we would make a recommendation to the Parliament about the adoption of standing orders, including any amendments that we had discussed. We can spend longer on the other matters. We cannot really address issues such as committees and legislation until we have some experience of handling them.

We know about speaking, voting, questioning and about the role of the presiding officers. Those are all practical problems that we have come up against in the past few weeks. We have all identified what we think are problems or deficiencies—those are the areas about which we felt members had expressed the greatest concern. Those, therefore, are the areas that we should seek to amend by the autumn.

The comment about Opposition debates is a matter for the Parliament; it will take a decision in the light of members' views.

Michael Russell: I would have thought that it was a question for debate.

The Convener: My view is that the mover of a motion should have the right to sum up at the end of that debate. Not everyone will agree with that.

Michael Russell: That is precisely the point. That was view of the SNP as the Opposition party that lodged the first motion that was opposed—by Mr McCabe, in fact. The Presiding Officer ruled that, for that first occasion, the Westminster model would be followed. He said specifically that that was not a precedent and that the Procedures Committee should consider the matter. I think that he is expecting a recommendation from us on that. There are another 14 Opposition days before 6 May 2000—the next one will be a Conservative day some time in early September—so we need to have a view on the matter.

The Convener: All I am saying is that the

Procedures Committee can give its views and make recommendations, but it will be up to the Parliament to accept or reject them. Much of what we have been through in the summary may lend itself to consensual decisions. I suspect that this matter, however, will be a political decision. The committee is entitled to make a recommendation, but members will presumably vote on the matter differently from the way in which they would vote on methods of voting, which is a more practical question.

Michael Russell: I am optimistic that there will be consensus. I am sure we can achieve that.

The Convener: Your optimism has inspired us through the early weeks, Mike.

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): How does the convener suggest we prioritise this matter, which is, and will continue to be, an issue?

The Convener: It can be given high priority because there are not many options—it must be done either one way or another. The Parliament could be invited to decide on it in October, when we look at the adoption of the standing orders. I do not think that any member of staff is going to spend the summer beavering away at options. The choice is pretty stark. I hope that the Parliament will agree that it is not bound to follow Westminster precedent and that it is reasonable that those who have moved the motion should conclude the debate. That will be a decision for the members of the Parliament and there may well be political considerations.

Donald Gorrie: The decision could be made separately from that on the standing orders in September, or whenever. The matter is not listed in this brief as a standing order issue, so we could put it to the Parliament either with a recommendation or without one. As the convener rightly said, it is a matter that everyone should vote on and that we should just get on with. I do not see why we have to wait for further standing orders.

Michael Russell: The specific reason that the Presiding Officer referred the matter to this committee was that there was nothing in the standing orders about it. I would have thought that the fact that he referred it indicates that he may be looking for advice from the Procedures Committee before he makes another ruling.

Mr Kerr: When is the next Opposition day?

Michael Russell: It is up to the Conservatives—it is their turn next. I think that they are talking about early September to mid-September. Given that we will need a week when we get back, I suppose it will be in the second or third week of September at the earliest.

The Convener: The clerk and I had envisaged

calling a committee meeting for 7 or 8 September. As we have flagged up the issue, it might be reasonable for us to discuss it at that meeting and see whether consensus exists. We could—perhaps through some resolution of the chamber—operate on that basis pending the adoption of standing orders later in the year. That would give everyone time to think through how they want to play it.

Mr Kerr: I am a wee bit concerned about cherry-picking some areas; it could be argued that other areas could be dealt with quickly because somebody else on the committee might be highly motivated about them. We will see the context of this issue in the report that we receive from the officers.

The Convener: You are welcome to chip in with your views on any of those points, Mr McCabe.

Mr McCabe: I think that there is a good deal of consensus on this. The Conservative group—and certainly its representative on the Parliamentary Bureau—is, I think, minded to follow the view of the Executive, so there is much consensus.

14:45

Michael Russell: I thought that the convener's statement indicated that there were other views even in the Conservative party. I am sure that that was not lost on Mr McCabe.

Mr McCabe: Mr McLetchie's comments on the recess dates, after the Parliamentary Bureau had reached a consensus on the matter, were not lost on me either, but there we have it. Other people interpret consensus differently from me.

Michael Russell: It is breaking down already.

The Convener: Shall we return to the discussion of procedures?

Mr Kerr: Can we have clarification of when and how the report will be issued to us? How much time will we have to consider it?

The Convener: I have already outlined that, but I will do so again. We felt that a meeting should take place on 7 or 8 September, but that people's diaries were unlikely to lend themselves to our making a final decision on that today. However, we will examine the programme and fit in a meeting on one of those days. By that stage, there will be papers on all the issues, which will be placed before us for discussion. After discussing, debating and—if necessary—voting, we will issue the papers. Over the next month, there will be two further meetings of the committee, during which we will have the option of taking evidence or opinions from people who have an interest in this matter, and of giving members of the Parliament the opportunity to respond with their views. That

gives us another two weeks—

Mr Kerr: I am more interested in when we will receive the papers. That is what I am trying to establish.

The Convener: As soon as they are ready.

Mr Kerr: When will that be?

The Convener: Some of them may be ready very quickly. The aim is to have them ready for the meeting that we will hold in early September. If they are available in advance of that, they can be posted on e-mail, as the papers for this committee were. [*Interruption.*] The clerks anticipate giving us a single set of papers, which will consider all the issues, towards the end of the recess.

Michael Russell: Can we be notified of a date by early August, as diaries begin to fill up quite quickly?

The Convener: One aspect of procedure that I would like to consider at some stage is the habit of having clerks mutter to conveners rather than advise the committee directly. There is nothing secret going on.

Michael Russell: That is an important issue. Having sat through two sets of committee meetings, I believe that the practice looks silly and is quite unnecessary. This is not what happens at meetings of the Parliamentary Bureau, where clerks are quite free to speak. We should seek an early decision on that issue, or make one here today. I am sure that we are allowed to do that.

Janis Hughes: Surely it is up to individual committees to make that decision.

The Convener: I think that we can decide for this committee. We do not want to lay down a procedure for other committees.

Michael Russell: Can we make a decision for this committee?

The Convener: We should decide for this committee and feed that decision back through appropriate channels—via the clerk—with a view to other committees' adopting the procedure as a model of good working practice.

Michael Russell: We can tell the other committees that we have given our clerk, John Patterson, a voice and wait to see whether they let the other clerks have one.

The Convener: That takes us to the end of paper PR/99/2/1. Paper PR/99/2/2 is simply for clarification and sets out the order in which we should approach our work. We need to make it clearer than we did at the previous meeting that, in proposing the adoption of standing orders in the autumn to allow us to proceed, the intention was not to make only minor amendments. Today we

have tried to suggest that big changes may have to be considered on substantive matters relating to the conduct of debates. We should, therefore, pick out what we regard as the most urgent issues. Other issues are doubtless important, but they do not have the same urgency. In a sense, the good reputation and name of the Parliament depends on our sorting out issues such as parliamentary questions and ensuring that people have the opportunity of adequate debate. Those are the priorities that we have picked out. Paper PR/99/2/2 notes that further necessary changes will become apparent

“in the light of Parliamentary experience”.

Donald Gorrie: Does the convener wish to pursue point 1.4 of the paper, which suggests that the people who wrote the standing orders should be allowed to explain their decisions, so that they are not found guilty in their absence, so to speak?

John Patterson (The Committee Clerk): That would be one of the intentions of oral advice. The committee might want to invite the interim clerk or the director of clerking to appear before it to explain various points.

The Convener: We do not necessarily want to revisit the whole business, but during the recess the officers will identify areas where they have questions about the thinking that went into the original decisions. It might be useful for them to make approaches, as well as to consider lining up oral responses for us at a later stage.

Michael Russell: On the handling of parliamentary questions, for example—which was a clear recommendation of the consultative steering group report but seems to have found favour with very few members—it would, as a matter of courtesy and fairness, be helpful to know from the relevant members of the CSG what was in their mind. I would not want to throw out the procedure in its entirety, because there might be a rationale for it that we have simply not discovered. The CSG itself may want to propose a change.

Mr Kerr: We should remember that the group was making recommendations on paper, whereas we are working in real life.

Michael Russell: That is undoubtedly true.

Mr Kerr: To subject the group to such scrutiny would be inappropriate. It may say that we were quite right to make changes, because what it thought was a good idea at the time has turned out differently in practice.

The Convener: That is a point well made. We should not take an inquisitorial approach to the group or say to it, “You got this wrong, why did you do it?” This is about seeking clarification and establishing whether there is an angle on the problem that the group missed.

Michael Russell: That is exactly what I propose. The intention behind the report is, to some extent, indivisible and centres on the group's view of the Parliament—a view that we, to a greater or lesser degree, all share. If we are questioning a procedure that we think does not work, it may be useful to discuss with the group its intention, because, with a little imagination, we may find another way of doing things that honestly reflects that. That is the spirit in which I suggest this.

The Convener: Are we all agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Work Tasks

The Convener: Paper PR/99/2/3 is simply a note of the tasks that we identified last week. Obviously, the priority is to consider the most difficult aspects of standing orders; everything else will be programmed in thereafter. At this stage there is no point in trying to prioritise the rest of the programme; first, we need to get on with examining standing orders. We can consider the remaining items in the light of the decisions that have been made in that regard. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Attendance

The Convener: Paper PR/99/2/4 deals with other MSPs' attendance at meetings of the committee. Clearly, that is permitted and all interest is welcome. The question is whether we should provide papers for those members who indicate a desire to attend. I think that we should be as open and co-operative as we can. If Mr Smith wishes to come regularly, we will be delighted to see him and to issue him with papers. The same courtesy applies to Mr McCabe or any other member of the Parliament. Are we all agreed on that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Is there any other business? I have already informed members of the meeting with the Presiding Officer that has been arranged for tomorrow. That is all, unless a member wishes to raise something as a matter of urgency.

Michael Russell: There was a possibility that we might arrange a meeting with the Procedure Committee of the House of Commons. That is not a bad idea, because the committee has views on modern parliamentary procedures, even though it may not be able to put them into practice. We might find it helpful and I understand that the Westminster committee would find it helpful. I wonder whether that can be pursued after the recess.

The Convener: That is a perfectly fair point. Given the fact that both Parliaments will soon be in recess, it is likely to be some time before a meeting can take place, but I am sure that it would be a useful exercise that everyone would welcome.

Michael Russell: At the risk of creating a boring precedent as far as materials are concerned, the standing orders of the European Parliament and other modern Parliaments may have lessons for us. I am sure that the clerk sleeps with them at night and reads them regularly, but it would be useful for us to have sight of them so that we could decide on their relevance. Could we obtain copies both of the European Parliament's standing orders—which have changed since I saw them—and of the standing orders of any other Parliaments that might be relevant?

John Patterson: In English?

Michael Russell: That would be helpful. I can just about get by in French, but some of the finer languages, such as Finnish, would defeat me entirely.

John Patterson: I will arrange it.

Donald Gorrie: The relevant committee at Westminster is the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons.

John Patterson: There are separate committees for modernisation and procedure.

Donald Gorrie: We should speak to the modernisation committee. As there are differences of opinion, perhaps we should talk to both the radical and conservative wings of that committee.

The Convener: I am sure that, if we set up a forum in which to meet, we will have an opportunity to take views from both committees.

That concludes the business, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for your attendance.

Meeting closed at 14:56.

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