

PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 17 December 2002
(*Morning*)

Session 1

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2003.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Copyright Unit,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by The
Stationery Office Ltd.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office is independent of and separate from the company now
trading as The Stationery Office Ltd, which is responsible for printing and publishing
Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publications.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 17 December 2002

| | Col. |
|--|-------------|
| CONSULTATIVE STEERING GROUP INQUIRY | 2011 |

PROCEDURES COMMITTEE **19th Meeting 2002, Session 1**

CONVENER

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

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)

*Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)

*Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

John Patterson

ASSISTANT CLERK

Lewis McNaughton

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Procedures Committee

Tuesday 17 December 2002

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:35*]

Consultative Steering Group Inquiry

The Convener (Mr Murray Tosh): Welcome to the 19th and final meeting of the Procedures Committee in 2002. The papers that have been circulated contain the updated version—as far as it was agreed—of the first two thirds or so of our draft consultative steering group inquiry report. They cover the introduction to the report, access and participation, equal opportunities and accountability.

Annexe B was circulated by e-mail yesterday and members have a paper copy for today. It covers most of the same ground but contains some further changes. The most significant of those are suggestions from me for the introduction. They attempt in effect to pick up on many of the issues that have been discussed over the past two or three weeks. Unlike most of the other changes, they are reasonably substantive. I propose to go through them this morning and to explain the rationale behind them. That will be done on the same basis as has applied until now with the report: we have been agreeing an outline and we have been identifying and coming to tentative agreements about any difficulties. We have not been putting anything into the report in a final sense. Although that is what I had hoped to do today, I do not think that we are ready for that.

Members also have before them annexe C, which includes papers from Donald Gorrie, Fiona Hyslop and Gil Paterson. I think that we have now received the more substantive paper from Donald Gorrie, which is available for discussion. I will ask Donald to deal with that later, but I will hold over the contributions from Fiona Hyslop and Gil Paterson, who apologise for their absence today. Susan Deacon apologises for lateness.

Let us deal first with annexe A. It contains no substantive changes. The biggest ones were to numbering and were consequential on deletions and additions. There were also lots of minor textual changes. Those were circulated last week in the hope that everybody would be quite happy with them and that we could simply approve them and not get bogged down in trivial discussion.

Without going through annexe A, I invite members to put on record their agreement to the changes that have been proposed, unless they wish to raise any matters, which they are of course entitled to do.

I also ask the committee to delegate authority to me and the clerk to make any other minor changes. For example, lots of punctuation changes need to be made. I am sure that the committee would not wish to be discussing commas, colons and semicolons—the clerk is dreading that already. I think that it would be sensible for the clerk and I to do any tidying up necessary. We will of course bring anything that we think requires substantive change to members' attention.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I wish to make a point to which I alluded last week, although I did not make it explicitly. Susan Deacon has also made the point. We are doing a huge amount of work on this report and the body of the text is becoming quite cumbersome. Some of the issues can be resolved as we agree the content, go over it and extrapolate a preface or highlight the key points at the beginning of the report.

However, I still have a slight difficulty. Occasionally, we veer from specific and detailed prescriptive proposals to more general points about the principles on which the Parliament should operate. I am not entirely sure that we have got the balance right between the two. Susan Deacon is not at the meeting at the moment, but I know that she shares my unease. I am slightly concerned, as our proposals could end up being neither fish nor fowl. Are we establishing and reinforcing principles on which the Parliament should operate or putting down a detailed road map? There is a danger that we could do neither. We may wish to return to that issue.

The Convener: Absolutely. By the beginning of next year, members will have a worked-over version. I will finish the changes that I said that I would make in the power-sharing sections and the latter part of the accountability section, which I have been unable to complete for today. If members wish to make editing and slimming changes at any stage, they will need to do as I have done, which is to pick through everything and suggest what changes they would like to make.

I would not say that annexe B has been slimmed down, but it points up many broader issues. I have highlighted many issues on the basis of committee members' suggestions. Some things needed to have more text attached or to be more prominent in the report and I have attempted to reflect those concerns.

As I work through the detailed suggestions, I will take on board comments that were made last

week about inviting bodies or committees in the Parliament to make suggestions to us. There is a lot of detail, but that reflects the character of much of the detailed evidence that we took. We have to respond to points that have been made.

Do members agree to the changes in annexe A? It would be helpful if we could sweep them out of the road. Do members agree that the clerk and I can make further minor textual changes as we proceed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: That takes us to annexe B, which is the substantial paper that members must consider this morning. The paper contains a great deal of underlined text. It is taken from what we have cleared in principle so far—in other words, I took it from the web. It contains the bolding to which we agreed and much underlined text. Some underlined text consists of the minor textual amendments to which we have agreed, but much of it is additional text that I have written. I want to explain that text this morning, as there are amendments to the report that will need to be justified.

As a result of the numbering changes, I suggest that we work through the two documents in parallel, otherwise members might find it difficult to track what I am saying. All the most substantive changes are in the introductory section. The later changes are largely textual, but there is new material in the introduction, as it was not possible to recast the introduction until we had gone through the whole paper and tested the committee's views.

The first section of annexe B is entitled "Aims of the Review". The changes look reasonably substantial, but are broadly of two types. In paragraph 4, I have included the motion that the Parliament agreed to in 1999 to approve the adoption of the consultative steering group's principles. That was in a footnote, but I have brought it into the main text, as the statement is significant.

Paragraph 5 corresponds to the previous paragraph 6. I have reversed paragraphs 5 and 6. In what is now paragraph 5, I have taken the text from the end of the paragraph and put it at the beginning. It is substantially the same text, but at the beginning rather than the end. I have ended paragraph 5 with the second set of bullet points.

Paragraph 6 contains the text that was paragraph 5 and I have added a further sentence to it, which notes the fact that, in May 2000, the Procedures Committee agreed to investigate the application of the consultative steering group principles. I have added a little bit in paragraph 7 to distinguish between the two meetings. At the first meeting, we agreed that we would do the

work and we commissioned a study of the issues. At the second meeting, in 2001, we agreed the substantive remit. The wording of the remit is as it was. I have slightly changed the introduction to paragraph 7.

09:45

I have also slightly reworded the beginning of paragraph 8, although there is no substantive change. I have added a couple of sentences to paragraph 9 to emphasise that we will seek to identify areas in which the Parliament needs to make progress to achieve its objectives, that we will look firmly to the future and that we will make suggestions to other people and bodies in the Parliament about how we might move forward. Those changes are not substantive; they are largely a reorganisation of text.

There are no changes in the "Approach adopted" section, as that is largely a matter of record. I changed the "Structure of the paper" heading to "Our Approach to the Principles", because the paragraphs in question are largely an explanation of how we intend to address the principles, given our reversal of their order.

Paragraph 17 contains some minor textual changes. I included the suggestion from Professor McCrone's paper that power sharing should be regarded as an overarching aspiration. Professor McCrone enabled us to work that in. Paragraphs 18 and 19 are simply reworkings of the previous versions of those paragraphs.

As paragraph 20 is new, members will want to have a look at it. I point out:

"We have responded to many of the detailed points and issues which were raised with us, but this is not intended to be only a reactive report. We have tried to identify the overriding concerns of those who made submissions to us, and to relate these to the rationale underlying the CSG principles, and to the experience which we think that the Parliament has had in trying to operate within the spirit of the principles."

I still try to divide the context between the reaction to what people have said to us and the overview that we will take.

I have suggested "Overview of the Evidence" as the title for the next section, given that I have reorganised the later sections. As well as some minor changes, I have made some more substantive ones. Although the first three paragraphs of the section are simply rewording exercises, paragraph 24 contains substantial additional text, which members might want to examine. I reflect the slight tension that exists. Some people argued that blockages stood in the way of their effective participation in the parliamentary system. I have tried to deal with that and to acknowledge that we need to strike a balance. Although our perspective may often be

that we need to get on with the business of resolving issues, we must allow time for people to participate. Paragraph 24 is true to the spirit of the original version, which was paragraph 23, but it fleshes out the issues much more.

Paragraph 25 is entirely new. In the power-sharing section, I think that we are agreed—although we will have to test that finally—that our general attitude to confidentiality and privacy will be that matters that are regarded as confidential are confidential and should be dealt with in private. We will ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Parliamentary Bureau and the conveners group to consider how they might make their transactions more transparent. Those bodies should look at their agendas, minutes, papers and any other accounts of their business that they publish. That is the consensual way in which we will put such responsibility on to those bodies. It is a sufficiently strong message for us to be entitled to say, as I have suggested in paragraph 25, that privacy and confidentiality were raised with us as a concern. The argument is that current practice can be a barrier to true participation. That is a statement of the evidence.

Paragraph 26 is on the same point and it is entirely new text. I have included the argument, with which I think we all agree, that the Parliament is very open by any criteria that anyone cares to come up with and that much of the criticism has been overstated. I have also reflected the important point that Fiona Hyslop made, with reference to the bureau, that to open up business entirely could create difficulties. The bodies that might be invited to become more open in their business will have to take those difficulties into account. The paragraph goes on to say:

“we have previously welcomed moves to open up business further, such as the Bureau’s decision to publish a note of its decisions, and the SPCB’s decision to publish its minutes.”

I also indicated that we will return to those issues later in the report and that we will make further recommendations. We have not made the recommendations yet, but I think that we will recommend something that is sufficiently substantial for the comments to be justified.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): By far the most controversial issue that has been raised about committees meeting in private concerns their discussions of committee reports. I wonder whether it is worth mentioning that at this point in the report, although I know that it is mentioned later. A lot of people feel uncomfortable debating reports in public, but our feeling was that we should nudge people along that road and set a good example.

Mr Macintosh: Are we talking about discussion of reports?

Donald Gorrie: Yes. I refer to the finalising of reports in private.

Mr Macintosh: I am not sure whether the discussion of reports in private was a bigger issue than the tendency to drift into meeting in private unnecessarily, which I thought was more of a worry. I thought that among MSPs there was a marked reluctance to move away from discussing reports in private. Although concern has been expressed by people outside Parliament, inside the Parliament it is accepted that discussing reports in private is a good way of reaching agreement. The main point was about the number of meetings that are held in private unnecessarily and about the fact that we should work against the drift from open meetings to private meetings. I think that the convener has spotted a repeat in paragraphs 25 and 27.

The Convener: I am not focusing properly on this discussion, because I am trying to work out the sequence of the text. What is printed as paragraph 27 repeats material that we have just gone over. There ought to be text dealing with the media, which was the second broad issue. Paragraphs 28 and 29 pick up the media points and it is clearly the media paragraph that should go in at this point, but for some reason it has not. I will circulate that later. I do not know what has happened there. I certainly intended that we would deal with the material in paragraph 27, on privacy, as part of the participation issue. The argument that many of the witnesses made was that the lack of openness was a barrier to participation. That is the logic of the first sentence or so of paragraph 25. Paragraph 27 is an error.

Mr Macintosh: So the point has already been made. Will anything be added in bold at this stage?

The Convener: Yes, because I made changes to what was paragraph 24, on the role of the media. I have not got a clue what changes were made; they might have been minor textual changes. What was paragraph 24 is the second of the overview points. Either what was paragraph 24 or an equivalent paragraph should go in as paragraph 27. I apologise for the confusion; I do not know how it happened. I will circulate the text to members.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): I will make a point that I have made before on holding meetings in private. I have found holding meetings in private helpful. If we considered the issue from the outside, we would say that it is unhelpful for committees to meet in private and that they should be open and accountable. However, the private discussions are a helpful opportunity to share views.

I recall that when the Audit Committee was discussing its Holyrood report, members were able to exchange frank views on a number of witnesses who had appeared before the committee. That resulted in the report being a robust and frank document that was clear about what was required of the witnesses. I am not sure whether the exchanges between the various individuals who took part in the discussion would have been as robust and frank had the meeting been held in public.

It is easy to say from the outside that meetings should be open and I agree that we should say what is going on. However, when we are involved in discussions, we appreciate the option to hold the meeting in private. A private discussion is a helpful vehicle to ensure that we can be frank and open. We have to be clear about that. The private discussion was very helpful with regard to the final outcome of the Audit Committee's report on Holyrood and there are other times when frank and robust discussions in private have helped to develop reports.

The Convener: When we discussed power sharing, we agreed that committees should still have that option but that we would change the balance of expectation. Our concern has been that committee members have said as an automatic reaction, "We are finalising our report, so we will meet in private," rather than saying, "Well, we have difficult issues, perhaps it would be easier to discuss them in private." There is no justification for the number of discussions that have been held in private. That is a specific issue that we will include in the recommendations on power sharing.

For now, I am not seeking finalisation. I have included the suggested text to prepare the way for whatever recommendations we make later. We are clear that the minimal approach that we will take will be to encourage people to be more transparent and to seek ways of communicating their reasons and decisions more clearly. There was something sufficiently robust in the paper that entitles us to herald that at this stage in the report.

I propose to skip paragraph 27, because of the confusion, but I will come back to it. Paragraph 30 deals with a third perspective and equates with paragraph 26. Members will see that the changes are minor, as are the changes in the next couple of sections. Paragraph 32 is a fourth perspective on the development of links with civic society and the network of relationships. That corresponds with paragraph 29 in the previous draft and the changes are minor.

The fifth general point that I have suggested was not in the original draft. It is new text and it develops the evidence that we received. A consistent theme of our evidence is that we have been successful in building relations inside the

Parliament and with civic society, but less successful when we are dealing with unorganised society in Scotland. Beyond the established, resourced groups, we have not been good at reaching a wider Scottish public or communicating with less advantaged groups and segments of society. The criticism regularly made of the Parliament as a whole is that we tend to deal with the well connected, the well resourced and—the phrase that everybody uses—the usual suspects, because such people have been able to take advantage of the work of the committees.

10:00

Mr Macintosh: On a point of clarification, was paragraph 32 of annexe A omitted?

The Convener: No, I think that that paragraph comes in later.

Mr Macintosh: That is fine.

The Convener: I felt that paragraph 32 was about a specific matter that would be better placed with the recommendations on how we might work with various partnerships, rather than in the introductory section. Paragraph 32's important point should have been included later and I will ensure that it is. Thank you for that.

Paragraph 35 of annexe B makes a point that committee members have made several times, which is that many people are not interested in participation with Parliament and we should not necessarily worry too much if people feel that Parliament is nothing to do with them. Their lives might be touched by many of our decisions, but many people just get on with things and do not necessarily wish to become involved with political structures.

Paragraph 36 makes the critical point that there are people in society who have views and needs but

"lack the ability or knowledge to express them",

and that many elements of Scottish society

"have had limited or no real opportunity to make effective contact with MSPs and Parliament"—

and committees—

"because of their poverty, or insecurity ... lack of confidence in engaging with the political process or contacts with decision-makers"

and so on. Many of our witnesses argued that Parliament had to work a lot harder to connect with such groups and to deploy all sorts of innovative techniques for making and sustaining contact and for facilitating dialogue. I felt that that was a recurrent theme that we ought to place in the overview perspective. From that will come the sort of points that members made in previous meetings about how we engage with people, our

outreach work and how committees go into the community. I want to build later recommendations on that platform.

I have put a new heading after paragraph 36 largely because of Ken Macintosh's point that we have not been clear about the model of democracy that we are discussing. I have tried to work in a lot of new material about the balance between representative and participative democracy. I have reflected in paragraph 37 members' concerns about being drawn into a great deal of detail about parliamentary practices and procedures. There is a risk that we are overly focused on the Parliament and miss the important issues, which are about relationships among the governance partners: the Executive, the Parliament, civic society and the general public. I want to assert in paragraph 37 that, in the report, we will explore relationships, including areas that the CSG did not tackle. The CSG tended to focus on participation in the Parliament.

Paragraph 38 states that the CSG put great emphasis on a model of democracy that leans towards participative democracy. My summary of how the CSG viewed the Parliament might not be absolutely right, but I think that the CSG was coming from the view that the form of representative democracy that we had prior to devolution was breaking down under the pressures of low participation and turnout and citizen disillusionment and that government and politics in Scotland had become disassociated from each other.

The CSG's point was that the devolution of power to Scotland would not of itself make all those things different. An element of participative democracy also had to be built in to win legitimacy for the new institutions, to empower civic society and the people directly and to rebuild active engagement between the people and those charged with legislation and government. The CSG said that, by all means, we should change the structure, but we also needed a different type of politics—a new politics. The CSG very much emphasised the need to graft the idea of participation on to the existing structures and to instil that idea in the new ways of working.

That is not to say that the CSG was necessarily unrealistic about what could be done—the participative model can perhaps be carried too far. In reality, the CSG compromised quite a bit. I have reflected that in paragraph 39, which includes a reference to Paul Martin's "real world", which is obviously something that we need to deal with. The CSG compromised in some areas, but the model that came through contained much that attempted to change the political culture, such as the electoral system and the decision to create and resource the Scottish Civic Forum. It also

contained a commitment to adopt the principle of power sharing in the consultation processes and as part of the CSG principles.

On the other hand, the CSG left unexplored, unexamined and untouched issues that have come up in our inquiry, such as the working of the civil service, the power of the Executive and the role of political parties. Members have regularly mentioned that the CSG did not address the fact that political parties have to operate.

Paragraph 40 contains a substantive point. Given that I have stated that we are agreed on the point, we will need to agree it formally at some stage. The paragraph states that Scotland is trying to develop a compromise between the two models by providing a distinct place for a participative approach while recognising that representative democracy is significant. The paragraph also states that we consider that the older model of representative democracy has a great deal to offer, as it reflects the reality of how government and politics work. Our task is to find a practical synthesis between the two models that will allow the Parliament to develop a relationship with civic society and draw the Executive more firmly into the new politics of the participative model.

I have included text in paragraph 41 that in effect defends the traditional model of representative democracy and, I hope, shows that it has a significant place. I have argued that political parties are oriented towards achieving goals. Parties are founded on the premise that the leadership will propose policies and secure mandates through the electoral process so that those policies can be translated into reality. Electors respond by voting for a political leadership according to their views. Those goals are then delivered by the parties, which organise themselves to form Governments and use their parliamentary majority to deliver what was promised in the election process.

Whether people like it or not, some things are part of our structure: whipped votes; the idea that Oppositions will take an oppositionist view of things; and the attempt by political parties to manage the media to get their views across. The fact is that people will grandstand or strike attitudes—or whatever people want to call it. All those things have continued into devolved Scotland. In the real world, those things will always exist. As Paul Martin said last week when we discussed First Minister's question time, there will always be an element of theatre and of gladiatorial contest between the leaders of the political parties.

Paragraph 41 is meant to state the case for representative democracy. Paragraph 42 suggests that we also need a participative element. That is implicit in the CSG principles. All the CSG

principles bar one sit nicely with representative democracy, as accountability, power sharing, access and equal opportunities can all be grafted on to representative democracy. However, the very fact that we talk about power sharing shows that there is some commitment to move towards the participative model. That was a radical departure.

I have ended up restating the existing text that said that we would concentrate on power sharing as the most difficult area. I have beefed that up a bit at the end of paragraph 42 by stating that we will examine all the principles, but that power sharing is the critical area, where our performance to date needs to be looked at most closely. We also need to examine the relationships among the governance partners.

I stress that that is all still tentative, but I would like views on the section as a whole. Do members think that I have addressed the issue reasonably fairly? Is there a bias one way or the other, or is anything absent that should be included? Am I right to focus on the two models?

Mr Macintosh: Indeed. I congratulate you on having a go at that, convener; it has bedevilled us throughout the inquiry. In general, you have got it right and you have certainly captured the spirit of the argument or, rather, the tension between the two models of democracy. I agree with the direction in which you have headed—laying out the arguments and suggesting that we agree a compromise between the two—although a couple of arguments are stated rather boldly.

Paragraph 38 states:

"The traditional model of 'representative democracy' seemed largely to have broken down".

When you read that out, you said that representative democracy appeared to be breaking down. That is a nuance, but the point is to reflect the balance between the two points of view.

Paragraph 40 states:

"the older model of representative democracy still has much to offer"

and paragraph 41 states that

"The reality is that the traditional political process still serves potent purposes."

That is a slightly defensive way of stating what is still the practised and understood model of democracy in this country. We should not state that defensively, as if it is an old order that is about to be overthrown, because it might remain the way of the future. Participative democracy has never been fully established in any form.

I would like some of the elements that do not come out clearly in the evidence to be reflected.

The reality of the Parliament and of the way in which people vote is that we vote along representative lines. There is an argument that people are turning off politics altogether and we often seem to be searching for solutions among different models of democracy, but that might not be where the solution lies. Strangely enough, partisan behaviour in representative democracy is getting stronger. Despite our new high-profile independent members in this Parliament, independents are disappearing off the political scene at local and national level. Members vote vigorously along party lines in this Parliament and no matter what arguments are put in the Parliament, the public vote along party lines.

The public have mixed views about participative democracy because, as I said, although many people want to be consulted and want their views to be taken into account, they do not welcome constant referenda or constantly being asked questions. They elect politicians to make decisions on their behalf and they have the chance to throw them out at the next election. That is not just an observation on the way that the Parliament operates; it is an observation on the way in which the public operate when it comes to exercising their vote in elections.

One point about the report as a whole is that it contains an implicit criticism that the Executive parties are the only ones that behave in a partisan manner.

The Convener: No—it is not true that only the Executive parties do that.

Mr Macintosh: It is not true, but it is in the nature of the fact that the Executive is the dominant force.

The Convener: That is why I put in the expression "noisy oppositions" somewhere.

Mr Macintosh: Yes, indeed. I was going to ask you what "attitudinising" meant in paragraph 41, but I am sure that you will elaborate on that later.

All parties in the Parliament behave in a partisan manner. In fact, the whipped behaviour of individual members in the Parliament—for example, in votes—is at least as typical, if not more typical, of our behaviour than our attempts to find consensual cross-party agreement. It is difficult to know which approach is the more important; however, the report does not greatly reflect how common that kind of behaviour is among MSPs of all parties and therefore how much it underpins behaviour in the chamber and—less so—in committees. Although we are trying to establish a more consensual way of working, we have not fundamentally moved away from that whipped approach. Although we represent all sorts of forces, we also represent our parties.

10:15

The Convener: The expression “consensual way of working” is important. A consensual way of working and a consensus are two entirely different things. The first phrase refers to how people go about their business; although it does not commit people to agreement, it commits them to identifying areas of agreement. Perhaps we will return to that point later.

Your point about changing the phrase,

“largely to have broken down”,

in paragraph 38 is perfectly legitimate. I also take your point about the defensiveness of paragraph 40. In a sense, that paragraph is defensive because I was defending the institutions and practice against the more idealistic CSG model. However, I see that I can change the beginning of paragraph 40 to state that democracies operate in such a way and that no one so far has found a better model. If I do so, the first line in paragraph 41 should cease to be a problem. That was certainly not meant to be defensive; instead, it was meant to point out that the traditional political process is about delivering real things. That is very important. I also agree to take out “attitudinising” and put in a more appropriate word, although I cannot quite think of one.

Donald Gorrie: Posturing.

The Convener: Yes—or grandstanding. It is the “we are here to make a fuss for the sake of it” idea and is very much my nod to forces other than Executive parties. I quite agree that partisanship and whipped voting are present in all parties and that no one party in the chamber is better or worse in that respect—with the exception of Donald Gorrie.

Paul Martin: My comments are similar to those that Ken Macintosh made. I am more than happy with the way that the convener has captured the committee’s views. You have entered the real world by saying that, although people might not like the party whip system, it is a necessary part of politics. Even independent members have formed coalitions, although they might not be in a position to whip each other. However, we should be clear that trends throughout Europe have shown that independent members have consistently formed informal coalitions. The same could be said of the voting pattern in this Parliament, in which single members have taken part in certain voting opportunities. As a result, although whipping is not evident, there are still opportunities for such informal coalitions to be formed.

The Convener: The Athenian democracy model of a parliament of utter independence was all very well when government was about weights and measures and keeping the slaves under control.

Donald Gorrie: And the women.

The Convener: Indeed. The Athenians did that as well.

If government is a matter of moving programmes forward, commanding resources and shaping agendas, some kind of vision is needed. We are all members of political parties for certain reasons, even if we sometimes struggle to remember what they were. The nature of politics is organisation; it is all about capturing the vehicle and steering it in a particular direction. We all want to do that to some extent.

Donald Gorrie: In the past, other members of the committee have rightly made the criticism that the CSG principles and some of the discussion that arose from them ignored too much the power of the parties, which—whether we like it or not—is a fact of life and we must recognise it.

We do not operate in a vacuum. We have made significant efforts to be more open and accountable, but many parts of the country do not see Westminster and local councils as being as open and accountable. It is difficult for us to project our position. People see politics as a whole football match. We might say that we are the forwards and we are playing very well, but people may say that the defence is lousy so they do not like the team as a whole. We have to take account of the atmosphere in which we work.

Discussions such as this and members’ business debates show that members combine and discuss in a constructive way issues about which they agree or disagree. That comes in elsewhere in the report but it is worth restating because we are not untrammelled party animals.

If somebody asks me how they can get things changed in relation to X, I say that the Liberal Democrats spokesman on X is so and so and that they should get him on their side because he will then come to the group meeting and say that we should do something about the matter. He might persuade the Liberal Democrat group in the Parliament. I am sure that the same applies with ministers. If someone gets a minister or a spokesman of a party on their side they will get things done. Influence is most effectively achieved through the parties, because they are a fact of life. At some stage it should be recognised that there is an opportunity to influence parties.

Such influence sometimes works. I will give two examples. My perception of the warrant sales issue was that enough people went to enough MSPs to say that they wanted warrant sales to be ended and that their MSP should support the bill, even if it had flaws. Enough MSPs went to their party groups and said, “Look, we have to change this.” The reverse scenario is that there was great public agitation about section 28, but members

discussed the matter in their party groups and decided to stand firm on their position. Public participation can affect the Parliament and change the original party or Executive line. Agitation is done best through the parties. A member of the public can also go to a parliamentary committee, but they can get to the heart of the matter through the parties.

The Convener: That is an interesting perspective. We could perhaps take something out of that and include it because parties are a vehicle for public opinion to influence politics, but they are not captured in the formal model of consultation documents and parliamentary committees. Politicians—at least those who wish to succeed and survive—whatever their faults and whatever criticisms are made of them, have always had to be receptive to public opinion and the demands that it makes.

I organised a lot of the rest of the section around the Executive and the position that it holds within the Parliament. A lot of text was already in the original draft about that and about the dominance of Executive bills, Executive personnel and so on. I have expanded it a wee bit and have tried to add some context. There is a new sub-heading and a new paragraph 43. I talk specifically about power sharing. What do we mean when we say that power sharing is one of our principles? It requires us to consider the balance of power, influence and resources among the partners. Realistically, that means the balance of power between the Scottish Executive and its partners; those are the Parliament, organised civic society and the people of Scotland—a further step away from organised civic society. I am not sure that we have stated that explicitly anywhere, but we can pick that up in a final tidying up.

I am stating that

“executive power has its purpose”,

and that in power sharing,

“sharing it, within agreed parameters and for agreed purposes”

should not been seen as diminishing Executive power, but as lending it legitimacy. For example, if the Executive wanted to put a bill through Parliament and just rammed it through without consulting anyone, would that be fair? If the Executive was sharing power, the proper thing would be to set up consultation procedures to gather opinions and to try to present a generally accepted change in the law in a fair way. In that way, people would feel more confidence in the law that was produced. That is the spirit in which the whole devolution settlement attempts to work.

What is required of the Executive is openness about what it is doing and where it is willing to consult. The paragraph mentions “a levelling of

resources”, but that is perhaps not an accurate way to put it. However, there should certainly be a willingness to put at the disposal of the other partners the resources that they need in order to be able to play their part in power sharing—by funding the Scottish Civic Forum, for example, and by ensuring that the Parliament has adequate resources to do its part of the business. I am not saying that the Parliament and the civic forum should have the same resources as the Executive; there is perhaps a bit of ambiguity in the phrasing of the paragraph, which I should tidy up. However, the Executive should have

“a willingness always to exercise power with restraint”—

that is, with the constant recollection that the commitment is to consult and to share power.

There is a tremendous temptation for the Government to say, “Here is the agenda. Let’s just crack on with it. Let’s just do it.” However, those in the Government must remember to consult and to follow the consensual way of acting. That is the philosophical basis for much that is in this part of the report.

Thereafter there is quite a bit of text that is largely the same, but fleshed out a wee bit from time to time. In paragraph 47, we had already referred to

“the dominant role which the Executive plays in legislation”

but I have made it more clear, in order to provide a link between paragraphs 47 and 48. In paragraph 48, I have made clearer what we are saying. We had this stuff in previously about the majority of the bills being Executive bills. I am saying that the fact that the majority of bills come from the Executive should not been seen as somehow working against the principle of power sharing. The Executive’s bills are the subject of consultation and have been through a process, which means that they are more than just Executive bills—they are bills that have been widely discussed and shared in the Scottish community. However, we want legislation to have the widest possible public support.

I have made minor changes to paragraph 49, for the sake of clarity. In the original report, we touched on the block vote on the Parliamentary Bureau. I have included at the beginning of paragraph 50 that the Executive’s majority in the Parliament, its weighted majority on the bureau and its majority on committees reflect the general election results—they are part of the model of representative democracy. The CSG recognised that. It dealt with the importance of the budget and said that it recognised Executive power and wanted to temper it with a culture of openness and accessibility. That is all stuff that we have agreed already.

Mr Macintosh: This section of the report—especially the bit that is coming up—raises a number of points. I am slightly uneasy about some of the wording, but I am afraid that I do not have any solutions. I do not mind the direction in which we are heading in paragraphs 47 and 48, but I am concerned about the wording of paragraphs 49, 52 and 53.

The Convener: Paragraph 52 is drawn from stuff that Professor McCrone did for us last summer. Like the later paragraph about the bureau, it is a statement of what is alleged to be flawed about the political system. We pick up a lot of that later and deal with it.

Mr Macintosh: Although I do not dispute that those views were given in evidence and that they are held strongly by certain people, I am concerned by the tone of our comments on them.

10:30

Looking at them now, it is difficult to suggest any amendments. I am not saying that we should not reflect the views, but a momentum builds from paragraphs 49 to 52 especially, which targets the Executive's dominance in a way that implies that that dominance is unfair. Paragraph 55 goes on to say that the Executive is committed to the CSG principles. It might, perhaps, be fairer to say that the Executive is committed to the CSG principles but has a longer way to travel.

I do not have any amendments to suggest today, however.

The Convener: That is perfectly fair. The bullet points in paragraph 52 refer to issues that we return to later in the paper. In some cases, we will make recommendations to deal with the criticisms and in other cases we will say that the criticisms are wrong. For example, we discussed whipping and agreed that there is a role for it and that we may have something to say about the circumstances in which it should be used.

Paragraph 52 states that

"committees are weighed down by legislation and scrutiny, at the expense of independent policy review".

We will probably agree that there should be more scope for committees to manage their business, but it is still important that they do the legislation and scrutiny work. We will make recommendations in most of those areas.

I have included in paragraph 53 an expression that some of the criticisms are overstated. However, if criticisms are made, they should be reported. The question is how we should deal with them. We should deal with them by taking members through the report and pointing out how much needs to be changed, thus ensuring that our recommendations lead to a working through of the criticisms.

I am quite happy to consider any suggestions, such as those that were made in relation to the preceding section, as to how we might change the phraseology, balance the tone or change the nuance.

Donald Gorrie: Perhaps a balance could be better achieved if the term "however overstated" in paragraph 53 also appeared in paragraph 52, so that it does not sound as though we are endorsing the seven bullet points.

The Convener: That is quite important. Do members feel that paragraph 52 endorses the criticisms? Is Donald's suggestion a way to deal with that?

Mr Macintosh: It is possibly a way to deal with that, but the phrase

"However, we are concerned at criticisms that"

implies that we are endorsing the criticisms. It might be better were we to state merely that the criticisms have been made.

The Convener: You are suggesting that that phrase be changed to "we are concerned that criticisms have been made".

Donald Gorrie: This might be a pedantic point, but the references in paragraphs 49 and 40 to the Scottish Executive's "weighted majority" in the Parliamentary Bureau might affect the perception of the document. The voting reflects the strength of the different parties. The Labour business manager goes along with, I think, 55 votes in her pocket and our chap has—

The Convener: I think she keeps them in her handbag.

Donald Gorrie: The word "weighted" suggests that the vote is cheated in favour of the Executive, which it is not. We are possibly arguing that it should be biased to the extent that some back-bench members should get in, but however much I object to it, it is a straight democratic proportional representation issue.

The Convener: I saw that as a neutral expression—a way of saying that the result of the election was important; however, if colleagues feel that the phrase should be changed, I am quite happy to attempt to do so.

Donald Gorrie: We want the Executive to feel that we are getting at them in a fair way rather than an unfair way.

The Convener: Absolutely. This committee's purpose is not to undermine the Executive or to suggest that the Executive is somehow illegitimate. Our purpose is to call the Executive to account, change some working practices, encourage and deepen others and to develop relationships. I expect that the criticisms that we

are talking about could be made of Westminster and of most parliamentary systems in the western world. Some of the criticisms stem from oppositionism and others stem from the view that the system needs to be more participative. Those tensions will always exist, however.

We will try to change the wording of paragraph 52 in the way that has been suggested to see whether that takes care of the problem.

Paragraph 53 is in accordance with Professor McCrone's memorandum, which stated that devolution has changed the locus of Executive power but has not sufficiently changed the nature of the political institutions. McCrone felt that there was a risk that public support for devolution would ebb away if we did not make progress with the power-sharing agenda. Paragraph 53 attempts to state that, although the institutions are not under threat, we are at a crossroads. There has been a lot of good will towards the Parliament and we have found that those who have dealt with the Parliament have had confidence in it. However, unless we overcome what people feel to be weaknesses, support might ebb away and we would come to be regarded in the same way as politicians in every country are regarded. We would then have lost the opportunity to build a new way of working. I have summed that up in the paragraph by talking about

"a more participative, and less cynical, political culture in Scotland".

There might be a more elegant way of putting that, but that is my distillation of what I thought the CSG wanted. I believe that it was intended that there would be more participation and consultation and that people should feel more connected to our political institutions and less cynical and negative about politics than people throughout the western world tend to be.

The next couple of paragraphs concern a matter that got me into trouble the first time round because Fiona Hyslop thought that I was being too friendly to the Executive. Paragraphs 54 and 55 correspond with the old paragraphs 40 and 41. The point that Fiona Hyslop and Susan Deacon made was that, although the Executive had committed itself to applying the CSG principles in its day-to-day work with the Parliament, we should put more emphasis on the Executive's applying the CSG principles in its day-to-day dealings with everyone, not just the Parliament. I have therefore put a phrase in paragraph 54 that points out that the Executive's commitment was explicitly to apply the principles of the CSG in its dealings with the Parliament and I have put another phrase in paragraph 55 that now reads:

"we recommend that the Executive should continue to inform all of its actions and policies by reference to the CSG principles, in its own internal operations, and its

relations with civic society and the people of Scotland, as well as with the Parliament."

That does not mean that we are saying that the Executive has to make absolutely everything open, but that the Executive should be participative and consultative and should consider where it might encourage more participation in relation to the evolution of policy. I think that that is implicit in the Executive's commitment to apply the CSG principles, but the wording of the declaration was careful to talk only about dealings with the Parliament. The impact of paragraph 55 might be to deliver a more open model of civil service participation with Parliament and civic society, as various departments operate differently in that regard.

Mr Macintosh: I do not want to say that your interpretation is cynical, but having just talked about a less cynical political culture, you now interpret the Executive's statement to mean that the Executive will apply the CSG principles only in its dealings with Parliament rather than that the Executive accepts the principles and will try to work towards them in its relations with the public and civic society. I am not sure that I agree with your interpretation.

The Convener: I am not saying that. It is implicit in what the Executive has said that it accepts the CSG principles throughout. However, I am conscious that the CSG report does not really deal with the workings of the Executive although it dealt firmly with the Parliament. The Executive's statement touches only on its dealings with the Parliament. What I am saying is implicit, but I think that we should make it explicit.

Mr Macintosh: Paragraphs 54 and 55 suggest that the Executive has made only a limited commitment to the CSG principles because it has committed to applying the principles in its relations with the Parliament but not in its relations with everybody else. The paragraphs imply that we wish that the Executive would make that commitment.

I state openly that the Executive needs to become more open. The contrast between the civil service culture of the Executive and the openness that we are pushing in the Parliament will prove to be a difficult problem for the Executive. Donald Gorrie mentioned different models of government in Scotland, including local government, the Executive and the Parliament. No matter what the Parliament does, if the other models of government do not join us in the devolution project, we will be swimming against the tide or we will be undermined by other activity.

We should recommend that the Executive open up and we will come to Donald Gorrie's paper on particular mechanisms for achieving that.

However, I am not sure that we have got the wording right in paragraphs 54 and 55.

The Convener: Perhaps you could produce an amendment or a variation on what you have just said that would capture what is intended in the paragraphs in a way that removes the accusation that the Executive has partially resiled on what it said it would do. That is not what I intended. I used the word “explicit”; perhaps we could work in the word “implicit” as well.

Mr Macintosh: I will consider the matter further, but I will make two suggestions now. Perhaps we could take out the phrase

“in its dealings with the Parliament”

in paragraph 55.

The Convener: We could just start the paragraph with the phrase “We recommend”.

Mr Macintosh: Yes. That would not imply that the Executive is not trying to follow the principles. We might have to consider the issue further.

The Convener: We can consider it further, but there seems to be no immediate problem.

Mr Macintosh: I want to go back slightly to paragraphs 49 and 50. Donald Gorrie made a point about the phrase “weighted majority”. We should change the phrase in both paragraphs to “majority voting” or simply “voting”. Paragraph 50 mentions the “Executive’s majority”.

The Convener: We could say “the method of voting on the bureau”. The report touches on how the voting is done, so if we simply say “the method of voting”, that would be entirely value-free. In the original text we had “block vote”, but it seemed to me that that was not accurate because the term refers to a specific thing that was used for trade union voting in the old days.

Mr Macintosh: Unfortunately, it is a pejorative term, much as I would like it not to be. I suggest that, rather than “method of voting” it would be better to say “the exercise of the vote in the bureau”. The Executive’s exercise of its majority vote in the Parliamentary Bureau is what causes problems. It is a fact that the Executive has an absolute majority, if it chooses to exercise it. The word “method” implies that the system is wrong although, as Donald Gorrie says, we might suggest a different system.

The Convener: Any alternative system would contain the Executive’s majority. It is not the system that matters, but the fact that the Executive chooses to use the majority.

In the rest of the introduction, the biggest change is the insertion of a subheading to distinguish what went before from what follows. One of the thrusts of the report is to focus on

relationships between the people who are partners in governing Scotland. I have made a minor textual amendment to paragraph 56 to reflect that.

I have suggested a couple of minor changes further down. Paragraph 60 contains more specifically the point that people made to us repeatedly—that we must develop strategies for reaching beyond organised civic society. We must draw “socially excluded groups”—I hope that that is the right expression, but we will change it if it is not—into partnership if we are to be a genuinely inclusive Parliament.

10:45

Mr Macintosh: I want to return to paragraph 58. Many people’s contact with the Parliament is contact with their MSPs.

The Convener: I have dealt with that point later. I have produced some text that I hope the member will like.

Mr Macintosh: I am slightly embarrassed by the statement in paragraph 58 that

“MSPs are a rich resource”.

Donald Gorrie: I am sure that Kenneth Macintosh is a rich resource.

Mr Macintosh: I would love to think so. The term is flattering.

The Convener: I did not intend to have a dig at anyone’s pay level.

Mr Macintosh: The term “rich resource” is warm and flattering. My point is more basic. MSPs tend to be the public’s point of contact with the Parliament.

Paul Martin: We could say, “MSPs are a resource.”

The Convener: The point is stronger than that. We want to emphasise the importance of contact between the public and MSPs. I agree that the term “rich resource” might not be the best way of describing that. We will think about the matter.

Paul Martin: We talk about making contact with community groups, but we do not touch on the resources that are required for us to do so.

The Convener: We deal with that issue later. In the introduction I am trying to deal with broad-brush issues—principles. Details have been fed into later sections of the report. My suggested changes prune recommendations out of the introductory section. We are left with two recommendations that are core recommendations of the report. They relate to power sharing between the Executive and everyone else, and inclusion of the disconnected.

Donald Gorrie: In honour of Paul Martin’s efforts, the Springburn tenants association—if that

is the right title—should be cited as an example of an organisation with which the Parliament should engage.

Paul Martin: It is the Springburn central community council.

The Convener: The organisation is present later in the document in spirit, and I have no objection to its being mentioned. It is certainly mentioned throughout the *Official Report* of our meetings. All sorts of examples have been included in the report, so I have no objection to including the Springburn central community council.

We can rattle through the other suggestions that I have made more quickly, because after the introduction the density of changes is much reduced. The changes appear in the new draft report, but nothing is final. If later members find something in the report with which they disagree, they should raise the issue again—that is not a problem.

We have already agreed to the textual change that I have made to paragraph 61. The subsequent changes are minor. Paragraph 87 is entirely new. We have referred to videoconferencing, so I thought that we should indicate that there will be opportunity for much more videoconferencing in the new buildings, where all the committee rooms will be equipped for it. The paragraph is new, but it is not of concern. Most of the rest of the section is a description of evidence that we received, so it should not trouble members.

Before paragraph 126 I have inserted a new subheading, “Strengthening Access and Participation”. This is linking text—it clarifies what is meant, rather than changing anything. It plugs us into paragraph 118 of the original report, which now includes extra wording.

Mr Macintosh: Was Neal Ascherson’s recent paper—“Designing Virtual Citizens: Some Scottish experiments with electronic democracy”—about the use of electronic methods of encouraging participation and access submitted as evidence?

The Convener: No, it was not.

Mr Macintosh: May it be submitted at this stage? It is an interesting paper. I am sure that everybody got a copy of it.

The Convener: I am sure that we could have a look at it.

Mr Macintosh: The paper makes some interesting points about the Parliament being at the forefront of electronic communication and the different routes that we may choose to go down.

The Convener: When we produce a report, there is always the risk that we are overtaken by something substantial. One of us might look out

and say, “I wish we had had that. I wish we could have included that.” Right up to the end, we should throw in anything that helps to make our points.

Mr Macintosh: The paper focuses on our electronic methods of communication in the Parliament and makes some interesting arguments.

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I have a brief postscript to Ken Macintosh’s point. Having replied to that paper at a conference, I am familiar with it. That paper quotes somebody or something authoritative—I do not think that Neal Ascherson himself says it—as saying that we are the leading Parliament in the use of information technology. That is the one point from it that would be worth capturing. It would be really nice to capture the quotation that acknowledges the Scottish Parliament as the world leader in something.

The Convener: We cannot claim that statement to be official, but if that is as near as we can get to an official statement, we should certainly use it.

Susan Deacon: Forgive me for throwing that in.

The Convener: No, it was helpful. Thank you.

My next substantive changes come immediately after paragraph 130 about Professor Schlesinger, who talked about people interacting with their MSPs. I propose to insert paragraphs 132 and 133, which reflect on the role of the MSPs. That is the point that somebody mentioned a moment ago. Paragraph 132 states:

“We see the role of MSPs as a highly significant element in this approach”—

that is, civic participation.

“MSPs are closer to home than MPs, and they have more time available to them as a result to spend in their constituencies. The election of Regional members means that there are also more MSPs, and the Parliament has invested heavily in local and regional offices, and modern communications. We took a lot of evidence that the combination of these factors has meant that MSPs are highly accessible. We are also conscious of strong support for committees travelling for formal meetings and civic participation events throughout Scotland.”

Paragraph 133 therefore says:

“We agree that MSPs themselves are an important resource”—

I have not said “rich resource”—

“for the Parliament, and play a vital part in enhancing access by the people to the Parliament and politicians. There has been discussion, inside and outside the Parliament, about the allocation of time in the Parliamentary week between”—

that should be “among”—

“the competing claims of plenary, committee and constituency work. We put on record our strong support for

the allocation of substantial amounts of time for constituency work and work in local communities”

because we are not necessarily only in our own constituencies.

“It is simplistic to equate plenary time with work, as some commentators do, and we argue that it is essential that substantial time is available for constituency work if the Parliament is to meet the principles of allowing the public access to politicians and participation in their work.”

I thought that this was the best point at which to put those points in. I do not know whether that includes everything that committee members want to say on that area, but if they want to say more, this would be the place at which to add any additional points.

Mr Macintosh: I would just add that many citizens participate in politics only through their MSPs, whether by voting for an MSP at an election or, more likely, through the contact that they make by writing a letter or attending a surgery. That might be the only way in which they consider themselves to participate in government.

The Convener: We can certainly put that in. That is no problem.

Donald Gorrie: There is a Westminster tradition of MPs keeping very much to their own constituencies. Even if one MP's constituents could use a new bridge that might be built in a neighbouring constituency, for example, they would tend to leave such matters to the other guy. I feel that that applies less in the Scottish Parliament, because of the list members.

I think that the role of the constituency MSP could be expanded given the wider, regional context. That does happen a bit. From talking to colleagues, I am aware of the fact that a group of Glasgow MSPs studied the fraught issue of hospitals in the city in a consensual and helpful way. That does not, however, happen as much as it might. This forms part of the question of balance between list and constituency MSPs. Constituency MSPs should not feel inhibited from participating in issues that affect areas slightly wider than their constituencies.

The Convener: I think that constituency MSPs probably do that to an extent already, the Glasgow hospitals example being a case in point. I dare say that Fife MSPs will go and meet representatives of Fife NHS Board, for example—I know that Ayrshire MSPs meet local health board representatives. There might, however, be sensitivities around some activities.

I think that we addressed that point last week, when we were discussing the possibility of more regional meetings and of resourcing regional activities—although we are not laying down rigid rules about this at the moment. We are not necessarily referring to the electoral regions for

MSPs, as this might concern sub-regions or areas such as that covered by Greater Glasgow NHS Board, which can overlap parliamentary regions. Such activities could give constituency members a wider remit. That is an important point, and it would be awkward if constituency members felt that they were somehow not being enabled to participate on a wider regional issue that was important to them and to their constituents.

Paul Martin: Joint approaches have indeed been taken in Glasgow, but I would say that it has been left to the MSPs to form regional groups themselves. There is, for example, the Glasgow Labour MSP group. The various agencies have a role in that regard. The Greater Glasgow NHS Board would, on a very few occasions, ask a regional group of MSPs to pull together to discuss issues of common importance. Scottish Homes—which is now Communities Scotland—tended to meet MSPs at their request and Glasgow City Council regularly meets MSPs on a regional basis. Agencies have a role in forming some kind of structure.

I have met representatives of the Glasgow Alliance on only one occasion, through a request from MSPs. We might think that the Glasgow Alliance, which is a significant body, would want to have regular meetings with MSPs of all parties. Scottish Enterprise Glasgow has been a good example of an organisation that wishes regularly to meet MSPs, and I have been involved in such meetings at its request. There is a need to formulate that—not making such meetings compulsory, but ensuring that the agencies have some way in which they can come together with MSPs. The opportunity is there for MSPs to meet jointly with representatives of agencies.

I have never been at a joint summit of all the agencies in Glasgow. What an opportunity it would be to hold a meeting with Communities Scotland, Greater Glasgow NHS Board and Glasgow City Council. When meetings involving such agencies have happened, it has had to be at the request of MSPs. When MSPs have requested such meetings, people have usually wanted to know which agency will lead them. It is possible to get caught up in the bureaucracy of who pulls meetings together and of whether they could give rise to territorial difficulties among the various agencies or even among the MSPs. The paper gives us the opportunity to send a message to the agencies that we want to work with them and want to consider ways in which we can arrange such meetings.

11:00

The Convener: Could we look at ways of beefing that up in the later sections? There are two areas where that could come up, both of which are close together in the section on power

sharing. One was where we talked about regional meetings and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body resourcing them and taking the initiative. The other was in the code that we were suggesting should be drawn up about the relationships between list and constituency members. That sort of stuff could be extrapolated as guidance into that code, because it would not just be guiding MSPs in their relationships with one other but making recommendations for the whole public sector, including the health boards.

Paul Martin seems to be taking that a wee bit further, suggesting that there should be MSP involvement in community planning, bringing together all the agencies to determine wide strategies. That is perhaps taking the issue back to the grass roots, but it would also give us a role in the strategic thinking of our communities.

Paul Martin: That is the difficulty for the agencies. Who takes the lead?

The Convener: In some areas it works well and in others it is not happening.

Paul Martin: It is usually left to the local council, which usually makes an effort, but there is also a need to capture what we are looking for so that agencies understand that. Once they have an understanding of what we are looking for, nine times out of 10 they will try to accommodate that.

Susan Deacon: I endorse what Paul Martin is suggesting. It can be relatively easily incorporated, possibly following on from what is already in the report, which talks about MSPs as a resource. That resonates with me, because I was at a meeting of Lothian MSPs with Lothian NHS Board just last night. One of the things that we talked about, and for which I personally was agitating, was for the health board to make more use of MSPs as a resource. That is the thing that we should major on. It is a question of extending what is in paragraph 133 and suggesting that other bodies should view MSPs in that way.

I am conscious of the fact that many agencies expend considerable time, energy and resources on meeting individual MSPs at their request and on responding to individual inquiries. As Paul Martin suggests, they could consider ways of engaging with MSPs as groups, sometimes along party lines. Some agencies have experimented with that. Often, it depends on the issue under discussion. They should be thinking in terms of reaching out and initiating that contact, not just waiting for us to go and knock on their doors. A wee paragraph following on from what is already in the report would neatly incorporate that. It is an important recommendation that could flow from our work.

The Convener: Would you want to make those recommendations to local government as well?

Local authorities are qualitatively different from enterprise boards and health boards, which are all appointed, as local authorities are elected. Some of them might see what is being suggested as a model for them but, if they do not, should we be recommending that they should?

Susan Deacon: My view is that we cannot be prescriptive to any outside body in any event. All that we are doing is recommending good practice and talking about the value of engagement, not for its own sake but so that we can connect up the germane information that we receive as elected members with the work that public bodies are doing. That would apply to local authorities and to other organisations. The relationship is different, but we are not talking about a scrutiny environment first and foremost, although it could be argued that there is a degree of that. In the context of the wider governance of Scotland after the first term of the Parliament, it is a question of making connections between the different levels of representation and service provision. We need to do that in a way that is generally more resource efficient but which also brings people's thinking together for the greater good of the community. It flows that MSPs would be part of that, but it would apply equally to elected local authorities and to other bodies.

The Convener: We could insert something in this paragraph and later on as a cross-reference.

Donald Gorrie: We should take care not to tread on the toes of local authorities by, as Susan Deacon said, giving the impression that we are investigating and invigilating their activities. It is about the concept of a team and about councillors' being in a team in the regions with health boards, enterprise boards and everything else. We should all be co-operating better.

In my experience, where councils, health boards or enterprise boards have a knotty issue, they are quite good at getting MSPs involved. That is partly because they want to deflect any criticism if there is a nimby issue coming up. For example, in deciding whether Falkirk or Stirling should get a new hospital, where not only separate constituencies but separate regions were involved, there could have been a major war. Instead, there was a very sensible suggestion to site the hospital halfway between the two. As Paul Martin indicated, it is routine to look ahead and co-operate. What he said was very good.

The Convener: The next suggested changes pick up points that members raised in earlier meetings. First, somebody brought up telephone voice boxes as a way of making the system receptive. I am not saying that that should be done, but it is held up as a way in which we might encourage more flexible procedures.

Procedures are currently very formal, and people are finding ways to go beyond the formal processes and more relaxed ways of bringing in the wider public. The point of the paragraph is that we would encourage experimentation, innovation and diversity. Telephone voice boxes are mentioned because a member raised them as a specific point.

Mr Macintosh: I cannot remember what a telephone voice box is.

The Convener: I think you just phone up and register your view. The messages are then compiled into a digest of opinions. Fiona Hyslop raised the point.

The next suggestion concerns Paul Martin's point about members getting away from formal meetings and settings. I did not want to be too prescriptive. Therefore, I suggested that, if we want to encourage access and participation, there should be a range of approaches from committees. For example, we want them to move away from formal proceedings in large public buildings towards less formal procedures and settings.

The paragraph states that we recognise that some good practice currently exists, where some committees are developing a more informal approach. The conveners group should reflect that in its guidance and should encourage consideration of a variety of ways in which opinions might be gathered or there might be communication with the public. If we are going to say that committees should have more external meetings or that perhaps rapporteurs will attend external meetings, there are potential resource issues. For example, if a community hall must be hired, how does one go about doing that?

Paragraph 138 notes that the SPCB should consider the resources that are needed to enable participation services to assist small organisations and individuals to interact better with the Parliament. Advice could be given on what people should do, how they can get hold of our papers, how they can respond to consultations, prepare and make submissions and arrange meetings. Some resources may be available for participation services.

The MSP resource part was in the section on regional meetings, but I will make a note to check that I have carried that forward, because there is an additional resource question there. Are members happy with those suggestions?

Paul Martin: The paragraph has captured the point really well. During the discussions, I raised a point about evidence gathering. The Social Justice Committee, for example, has made several visits.

What is wrong, as part of committee proceedings, with visiting areas that are suffering

from social exclusion? We are good at saying that social exclusion is terrible and that we want to do something about it, but how often do committees visit areas that are affected by social exclusion or where there has been community breakdown? There might therefore be an opportunity to add in a paragraph about committee visits to areas that are affected by the subject under discussion, which would provide an opportunity to engage more effectively with the public.

The Convener: I remember your saying that and paragraph 137 is my attempt to get to that. However, if you want to add something, please do so, whether it is a new paragraph or an example. I am quite happy to underscore that point because you have said what I intended to say. The rest of this part is minor textual stuff.

The next substantial change is paragraph 146. Earlier, it was suggested that we wanted to make more of the education service and what it has been doing. I have put that in a new paragraph. It states:

"We were impressed by the efforts and achievements of the Education Service. Their activities are in great demand, and the move to the new building will be an opportunity to step up the Service's level of activity. We recommend that the SPCB should increase resources to match any additional demand for existing education services, and to develop 'outreach' activities as part of the Parliament's external communications strategy."

The final phrase is deliberately vague because we got suggestions that the education service is wonderful, but were questioned as to why the Parliament does not provide similar services for other groups in the community. The final phrase is an umbrella to suggest that outreach might be extended in all sorts of ways and the SPCB might wish to make proposals to extend it and widen and deepen its range as time passes.

Mr Macintosh: I agree whole-heartedly with the sentiment expressed in paragraph 146 but would like to expand it further if possible. It still feels slightly lost among myriad other recommendations. The education service has been pretty much an unadulterated success story, as far as I can tell, but it is working within limitations. As far as I am aware it has only three staff. The service is constantly booked up in advance so it is constantly in demand and is nowhere near meeting that demand.

There is also the specific problem with schools that are further away from the Parliament. There is no funding or help for schools to come to Edinburgh. Therefore, those schools that are geographically closer are over-subscribed and those that are further away have difficulty, although they are not excluded.

I am going against my earlier suggestion about not going into too much detail. However, I feel

strongly that the SPCB must address both my points with a view to expanding the service and providing help for schools and pupils from further afield.

The Convener: In saying that the service's activity level should be stepped up, I certainly meant to say that I envisaged more schools coming in. The current constraint is on the number of people that can be taken into Cannonball House.

However, I take your point about the idea that we should ensure that there is no marginalisation of remoter communities. I do not know how specific we want to be, but perhaps we should recommend that the SPCB should address the issue and come up with a strategy for ensuring that more distant schools are not placed at a disadvantage. It might be that that means that we must consider some way of bringing them here, or perhaps consider videoconferencing or staff going out to the schools. There are different ways of approaching the problem, but it is important to include the idea in the report and we will think of ways in which we might change it.

Susan Deacon: Is this the right time to make a couple of general points about the section before we move on to media?

The Convener: Yes. If you do not make your points now, I will jump on.

11:15

Susan Deacon: That is what I thought. I continue to have one overriding nagging concern about the section. It is not about anything that is in it per se, but about the theme of engagement for a purpose, which is not there or does not come through strongly enough. We are not just in the ball game of creating lots of opportunities for lots of people to talk to one another simply because it is nice, cosy and warm for people to talk to one another.

A service such as the education service is different. By definition, the reason for that contact is to introduce people to the parliamentary process, to have a two-way flow and to create a learning experience. However, engagement with MSPs, committees and others is more often than not for a purpose—to inform our decision making. It is important to stress that a wee bit more, particularly when forces—which the convener's amendments address—are at work to suggest that we are not very busy and not doing enough work.

Some of the section could sound as if we are finding ways to have more meetings and to talk to people. I know that it is not about that, but we must be explicit. I will return to my nuancing. Perhaps adjustments to a few paragraphs that

relate to engagement with the parliamentary process would stress that that is to inform decision making. If we return to first principles, one reason why the Parliament was to be open, accessible and responsive was not simply to make the processes of policy making and decision making more transparent, but to inform the outcome of that decision-making process so that it better reflects what the Scottish people want. That point is too well hidden in the section.

The Convener: Perhaps we could bring that in after the paragraphs that I have put in about the MSP's role, which concerns the ambassadorial role and letting people have contact and dialogue with MSPs. That role is legitimate. People like to meet and have dialogue with their MSP. We accept that that happens and we are not saying anything other than that, but we say that we will try to develop the MSP's role along the lines that Susan Deacon suggested. The role is for a purpose. It involves engaging with the people who develop policy and with the public, and involves finding an avenue for the public to engage with the people who make policy. I cannot word the rest of the paragraphs, but I see where you are going.

Susan Deacon: The two key words are "influence" and "inform". Engagement is about giving people an opportunity to influence decisions that are taken on their behalf and informing our decision making. All those points are in there somewhere, but they should be brought to the fore, instead of our dealing with engagement for its own sake.

The Convener: We can consider that.

Susan Deacon: My second point is about a similar overriding issue. I will return to another of my hobby-horses, which is the use of resources and efficiency. As in our previous conversation, in the report we skirt around recognising the fact that we must use resources better. It is important that we do not talk only about Parliamentary resources.

Paragraph 139 talks about the importance of using

"gateway organisations' ... in order to stimulate a partnership approach and to conserve Parliamentary resources."

It is important to say that we seek to make better use of everyone's resources. That responds directly to all the consultation fatigue-type comments and the feeling that is around.

I will be slightly self-critical about our own inquiries for a moment. I am conscious that an awful lot of the people from whom we took evidence are employed to engage with the Parliament. It is their job to meet MSPs, to seek to influence the process, and so on, but there are an awful lot of people on whom we are impacting—and who, conversely, would like to impact on us—

who have other jobs to do. It is important that we allow them to engage with us in as time-efficient a way as possible; otherwise, they will not do it because they cannot do it. In paragraphs such as paragraph 139, we should therefore weave in the point that we are seeking to make best use of the resources not just of the Parliament, but of those who engage with us, by exploring different forms of engagement. That point would be well appreciated.

The Convener: Stemming from that, we are talking in a fairly broad sense about allocating more resources here and there. Where we suggest allocating more resources, those resources should be for a purpose, to enable people to better communicate, better inform and better influence. We are not just saying, "Hand out the money to everybody." We are talking about targeting it at activities that might make a difference.

Donald Gorrie: There might be some wording somewhere to say that the issue is not about getting MSPs to work harder, but about getting them to work more effectively and getting the best possible mechanism to ensure that we are really well informed and that we make the best use of our time.

On the question of influence, there is a problem. When MSPs visit a school and ask what the problem is, we are told that there is nothing for children to do in the evening. We must all have encountered that, but we cannot do anything about it. The local council can give children something to do in the evening, or the Executive can start a national programme—either through the councils or otherwise—to give children something to do in the evening. We are told that children need something to do in the evening, but nothing happens. That is a problem. People again think, "God, those so-and-sos have not delivered." I have no solution to the problem, but it is relevant.

A downside of democracy is that it is all about arousing expectations that are impossible to fulfil. We talk to people in the best faith and they give us their views, which we can perhaps feed into the system. However, the chances of anything happening are often pretty slim.

The Convener: I have no further suggestions for changes until paragraph 182, which is new and has not been approved. I have expanded the paragraph a wee bit, where it talks about challenging the media to be involved with us, extending media coverage, presenting ourselves in more imaginative ways, and all the rest of it. I thought that we should put a bit of purpose in that. The purpose for developing anything in relation to the media is to try to increase the flow of available information. Again, it is not necessarily about working harder, but about working better to put

across what we do and what we are looking for. The paragraph also raises some resource questions about the strength of our media relations people, as we are perhaps heavily out-gunned by louder voices.

I have made a minor textual change to paragraph 185.

Paragraph 197 is new. I do not quite remember where this paragraph came from. It is in the Scottish Civic Forum section. The Scottish Civic Forum is potentially a difficult area for us. We feel well disposed towards the Civic Forum and the idea of the Civic Forum, but we do not want to feel that that is our only option.

There was a sense in our earlier discussion that in order to reach people we would like to use whatever gateway organisations present themselves. That is what the paragraph suggests. It recommends that links between the Parliament and the people of Scotland should be developed through multiple gateway organisations. We are therefore saying that we will not rely on one organisation but that, having said that, the Civic Forum exists for a purpose and is resourced for a purpose, so it ought to give us great benefit and it should play a central role in our outreach work. I have tried to ensure that we touch all the bases; it is not hugely controversial.

I did an awful lot of work on the equal opportunities section when we went through the first draft. I do not suggest any further changes here, but I offer one thought on equal opportunities. The section focuses on our role as a legislative body—for example the importance of putting equal opportunities in all our bills—and on our role as an employer in relation to staff who work for us and for the Parliament. I will need to have another look through the report, but perhaps another focus is required. We make the point all the way through the report that one of our themes is to reach those elements of society and our communities who do not have much influence or access to decision makers. As well as being a participation issue and a power-sharing issue, that is also an equal opportunities issue and should probably be reflected in this section, since we are talking about the equal opportunity to influence what we are doing. Something more perhaps needs to go in at this point, but I have not thought the matter through and I do not yet have any text to propose. I do not know whether any members want to make other points about equal opportunities.

Paul Martin: I will raise an issue about paragraph 223. It states that we will not compel MSPs to take part in equal opportunities training, but a condition of releasing funds to pay for their staff would be that they have to take part in the training. Is not that contradictory? We are saying

that we will not compel MSPs to take part, but there will be an element of compulsion in the sense that the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body will release the money to pay their staff only if they take part in the training. There is an element of a requirement to comply. I am not saying that I am opposed to the equal opportunities training.

The Convener: We say that we will not compel because we cannot compel. The issue is what we should do to try to lever greater co-operation and to get members involved in programmes that they have not flooded into. When we went through the draft report for the first time, I said that the current wording might be strong meat and that we would want to consider the matter again. I suggest that we consider it again. I should have mentioned that. I am not taking the paragraph as being approved in any sense.

Paul Martin: If we are going to consider compliance in respect of this kind of training, several other aspects of being an employer also require compliance. A failure of the Parliament has been the training that has been provided to MSPs. Training opportunities for MSPs—whether on financial accounts, staff resources or whatever—are appalling. It has been very poor. The wider issue is that if we compel members to attend equal opportunities training, we will have to consider compliance in other aspects of an MSP's role as an employer.

The Convener: The last sentence of paragraph 223 will have to come out. Paul Martin has offered an important perspective. Perhaps we should broaden the point to include the other areas in which training is required. We have to create the expectation that the parliamentary authorities should be able to get members involved in that training. It is partly about providing the training. If the parliamentary authorities do not provide it members cannot have it, but there must be an expectation that we should accept it and participate in it. That has not been happening. I would like the element, not of coercion, but of expectation to remain in the report—although I do not know how that should happen. However, I am happy to broaden the point, because it is important.

Susan Deacon: It would be absolutely wrong to make the release of money for payment to MSPs' staff conditional on training or anything else. I disagree fundamentally with using that mechanism, other than in cases so severe that I cannot envisage them. I would be happy to lose the sentence.

The Convener: We could insert something about hot coals.

11:30

Susan Deacon: I agree with Paul Martin that there is a need to broaden the point that we are making. We are missing the bigger point about the larger bundle of issues relating to MSPs' staff and constituency offices. All of us have had experiences that indicate that too often MSPs' staff are the forgotten group in the Parliament. There are all sorts of rules, regulations, codes, protections and good employment practices for parliamentary staff—employees of the corporate body who work for the institution of the Parliament. The same is not true of MSPs' staff.

There is not a very good framework for MSPs as employers. That is part of the bigger picture into which equal opportunities fits. Every MSP has had to set up offices from scratch and to employ staff with minimal guidance and support. If we are serious about having an effective operation in the broadest sense, and about specific issues such as equal opportunities, we must recognise the area of activity that includes MSPs' offices and staff. People will not make that point in evidence to us—only MSPs can do so, as we are the people with experience in this area.

I am echoing much of what Paul Martin said, so at least two of us feel this way. We need to recognise the importance of the infrastructure of MSPs' offices and staff.

I am not sure where the second point that I would like to make fits into the report. Although we are giving ourselves big pats on the back about how well the Parliament has done on information technology, it has lagged behind badly in relation to MSPs' constituency offices—the remote access arrangements that exist and the technology that has been used to provide those. There is a real imbalance between the amount of time, resource and investment that has been devoted to making arrangements at this end—in the Parliament and in Edinburgh—and what has been done to support MSPs' constituency work in their local offices. I am particularly concerned about remote access arrangements. I know that that issue is now being considered, but such consideration is belated.

I am talking about the flip-side of the coin to all the nice shiny stuff that has been done in the Parliament. If we are taking an honest look at and commenting honestly on how accessible we are—I know that I have gone back from equal opportunities to access, but the issues are connected—we must beef up what we say about MSPs, their staff and their constituency offices. Only MSPs can make that observation. Others may have experienced the inadequacies of the service but may not know from where those inadequacies derive. We have dug a little deeper and know some of the answers.

The Convener: As Susan Deacon says, one of the issues is IT support. Other issues include personnel advice, job remits and conditions of employment. We may need to beef up what we say about those. This is probably a responsibility of the SPCB, but we should make representations to it.

Donald Gorrie: One positive idea that we could pursue is the setting up of training courses after the next election, which could cover those aspects. New MSPs should be required to go on such courses and returned MSPs could also attend. We started from scratch four years ago and were thrown in at the deep end. Even at Westminster, which has been going for centuries, members of Parliament are thrown in at the deep end. That is not good. Over the years, MPs have been notoriously bad employers and MSPs might begin to fall into the same category. I would not object to putting heavy moral or financial pressure on members to attend such courses. Susan Deacon seemed to object to that. Offering new members a good training and induction programme and giving existing MSPs a belated opportunity to learn something would be helpful.

The Convener: The objection to a financial lever is that it would represent a sanction against the staff rather than against the MSP. We would need to get round that. The fact that our employees are our employees rather than SPCB employees might be an issue.

Mr Macintosh: I would like to add my tuppence ha'penny's worth and to get a few gripes off my chest.

The Convener: I like the pre-decimal references.

Mr Macintosh: I am showing my age. I endorse whole-heartedly all the sentiments that have been expressed. I hope that all MSPs have discovered best practice through the trial and error approach.

The Convener: I should not think that that is the case.

Mr Macintosh: I hate to imagine what is actually happening in most offices. I want to compare resources for staff in constituency offices with those for staff here in the Parliament. All my researchers and staff are based in my constituency. If they phone up the Scottish Parliament information centre, they do not receive as high a priority for their research as parliamentary headquarters staff. It is totally unfair that staff who work from a constituency office get a different deadline.

Although I have nothing against the Parliament's information technology department, which has done a good job, my experience of the computer support that I have received over the past three

years is that it is totally geared to our system here. The security of the system means that remote access has been difficult. To be fair, the IT department is addressing that issue now.

I am in the unusual—although not very unusual—position of sharing a constituency office with the member of the Westminster Parliament for my constituency. The systems in the Scottish Parliament are almost designed to work against that—they offer no support. There is so little interaction between the systems designed by the Scottish Parliament and those designed by Westminster that they are designed to frustrate. Over the past three years, I have found that situation immensely frustrating, in spite of the fact that, to provide a better service to the public and to their constituents, MSPs and MPs should be encouraged to share offices. The institutional support to do that is not there.

I agree whole-heartedly with Donald Gorrie's idea that guidance should be provided for the new MSPs who come in, for which we can sign up secretly or even publicly. There is a section about providing guidance. Although I am not happy about a job description, which we talked about, I am in favour of guidance for MSPs. There should be internal guidance on how to be an MSP, which should include examples of good practice from which we could all learn.

The Convener: It is a bit of a cop-out saying that the new MSPs should have to do that. That lets everyone else off the hook.

Mr Macintosh: I am not saying that there should be an obligation on all MSPs to receive such guidance, but the opportunity should be there. I would take advantage of such an opportunity. However, there should not be a requirement to do so.

Paul Martin: I feel strongly that such guidance should be part of a package. No public limited company that was responsible for scrutinising the expenditure of £17 billion would not give its senior executives training in the way that they spend their funds. As Donald Gorrie said, we seem to have been thrown in at the deep end and expected to get on with it. We are selecting one important area. That should be part of a wider package. One cannot deliver equal opportunities without a whole package to support the process. We are creating an expectation that equal opportunities should be treated on a singular basis. Treating it as part of a wider package would enable us to deliver on equal opportunities.

The main point that I want to make is that the delivery of training should be more flexible. In respect of the principles in the paper, a large percentage of the staff with whom I have spoken see life revolving around parliamentary

headquarters rather than in the constituencies. People frequently ask, "What is your extension number?" When they are told a constituency office number, there is shock and horror—it completely throws them. Training resources should consider outreach time. Why cannot trainers visit constituency offices and provide training opportunities?

In the real world, an issue that will arise is that MSPs will not attend training seminars for various reasons. There will be competing claims in their diaries. The provision of outreach training and specific consideration of the make-up of one's office would send out a serious message that we want to support MSPs.

Donald Gorrie mentioned being thrown in at the deep end. That is a dangerous situation for MSPs. We will probably miss out on many personnel issues, as we do not have any training. I do not want to get caught up in our local difficulties, but there should be a clear message that we want to deliver equal opportunities training as part of a wider package that ensures that we work effectively and efficiently.

The Convener: Many proposals have been made that we can work up in the paper or in a section on its own in the equal opportunities section. I thank members for the helpful points for action that have been mentioned.

As members have no more comments on equal opportunities, we will proceed to accountability. I have inserted new text in paragraphs 282 and 283 that points up issues rather than changes anything significantly.

Paul Martin: May I return to equal opportunities?

The Convener: Surely.

Paul Martin: Paragraph 270 states:

"We recommend that the idea of each committee having a 'champion' for equal opportunities ... should be considered carefully by the Conveners' Group."

I am not sure whether we agreed that the conveners group should take up the idea. I think that we wanted to know who a champion would be. There were issues about how a representative would be selected.

The Convener: I recollect that we thought that the idea was interesting, but were not keen to lay down the law. We saw the area as one in which the conveners group could think about how things might work. A person on each committee would need to be identified.

Paul Martin: Do you mean an MSP? I thought that we discussed external representatives.

The Convener: The issue will arise when we discuss power sharing. We must take a view on

the matter. The original suggestion was to allow co-option, but I think that the committee thought that we did not want to suggest that. We wanted to say that the Parliament should be able to take such decisions for itself, but we did not push that particular outcome.

Paul Martin: In paragraph 273, the words "and humanist" are underlined.

The Convener: That is because the words are inserted. At the previous meeting, we discussed covering all religious groups and denominations.

Susan Deacon: I thought that Paul Martin was going to ask, "Was that a Catholic or Protestant humanist?"

Donald Gorrie: Perhaps it was a factual point.

The Convener: Yes, it was.

Paul Martin: I just wondered whether that was going to be the final text.

The Convener: On accountability, my first substantive point is at paragraph 330, unless anyone has anything before that.

Susan Deacon: Have we dealt with the section on the Scottish Civic Forum? Did I miss that?

The Convener: We dealt with that. I think that you were here at the time.

11:45

Susan Deacon: Oh dear. Sorry. Perhaps I was here in body but not in spirit.

The Convener: I drew attention to paragraph 197, which was an additional piece of text. You were probably concentrating so hard on what I said that you missed the subheading.

Susan Deacon: Absolutely. Am I allowed to mention it now?

The Convener: As I said at the beginning, we are not considering a bill. Once we have gone past something, we are allowed to go back to it.

Susan Deacon: I was here and you went through the section on the Scottish Civic Forum, but I have missed no discussion this morning on that section. Is that correct?

The Convener: That is correct. The only thing was that extra paragraph.

Susan Deacon: Was paragraph 197 the extra paragraph?

The Convener: Yes.

Susan Deacon: So paragraph 198 is the original paragraph and is in bold simply because it was in bold already. Is that right?

The Convener: Yes. It is in bold because it is a recommendation.

Susan Deacon: A number of us cast some doubt on that paragraph in the first discussion, if I remember rightly. I say that from memory, rather than having checked the *Official Report*. The discussion may have taken place in another context in which we discussed the Scottish Civic Forum, but several of us expressed the view that, although we recognised the valuable role that it played, it was not necessarily the body to single out to take certain matters forward.

In a similar vein, I did not think that we had agreed that we would elevate the Scottish Civic Forum to the level of our having a concordat with it. I really thought that we had explored that terrain and moved away from it.

The Convener: We certainly discussed the Scottish Civic Forum's effectiveness and contribution to date. We wanted to say that it was a gateway organisation, but that it was not the only one. That is the point of paragraph 197. It draws back in an earlier reference to using other potential gateways.

The idea of a covenant comes from the sense that an agreement exists between the Executive and the forum, but that there is no such agreement between the Parliament and the forum. Whatever the experience with the forum has been, my sense is that something like what the forum was conceived to be should exist, should be worked with and should be supported.

If we do not have a civic forum, we will need to try to achieve the same effect from a much less structured mechanism of building up multiple contacts with multiple gateways. The way to handle that is to let 1,000 flowers bloom, but why should we throw out the Scottish Civic Forum?

Susan Deacon: Nobody is advocating throwing out the Scottish Civic Forum. This is exactly the discussion that we had previously. A number of us argued that we ought not to single out and elevate the Scottish Civic Forum to a status that differentiated it significantly from other organisations. It has been generally recognised, including within the forum, that the world has moved on from when the forum was first created, that the forum's role and purpose have evolved and that they have evolved in a way that, in some respects, has meant a more focused and more limited role than was once considered would be the case.

My only objection to paragraph 198 is to the idea that we should recommend a concordat and the like. I do not have a problem with the forum's being a gateway organisation, and potentially an important gateway organisation. The world has moved on from the point at which we should spend time, or recommend that the Parliament spend time, on drawing up a concordat with the

Scottish Civic Forum. My problem is with paragraph 198. That is all. I honestly thought that we had moved away from that approach some weeks ago.

The Convener: I remember that discussion, which was specifically about Barnardo's. Barnardo's had been identified as an example of another organisation. We have now taken Barnardo's out. Perhaps we need to review our earlier discussion. We did not feel that this was an area of difficulty. I suggest that we highlight the matter as one to return to. I would like to look at the earlier discussion. I have no particular axe to grind about a concordat. If we can find a better way to word paragraph 198, perhaps we could circulate it by e-mail and see what we can come up with.

I hesitate to risk this, but let us turn to the section on accountability. I think that the changes are all minor textual ones, except for the fact that paragraph 330 was meant to be an important one. As we discussed last week, we have to keep an eye on the fact that we are a unicameral Parliament. There is no revision chamber here. If we are inviting people to take part in the process, and if we want scrutiny to be utterly effective, we must realise that all that has to be done in our committees the first time round. I think that it was Susan Deacon who asked us to highlight unicameralness—or unicamerality, if that is the word. I have therefore included something on that subject. I draw members' attention to that, because the text might not contain everything that members want to be said. There might be other points to make, and there might be other places where members want to make this point. That is my opening bid, as it were.

On the rest of the accountability section, I have reworded the beginning of paragraph 336. Paragraph 334 was a new one, which emerged from our discussions about more flexible arrangements for stage 1 debates; we need to be conscious of the existing facility to expand the time available and allow members to speak. We tend to have stage 1 debates on a Wednesday afternoon and, if it were desired by members, the Parliamentary Bureau could extend stage 1 debates from Wednesdays into Thursdays. I have included that point, but I have added the caveat that we could not realistically expect such extension to be arranged at short notice, because it would disrupt the whole of the following day's business.

It would be a matter of the bureau thinking further ahead about how much time it allows for debates, on the basis of any intelligence that it might receive about the number of members wishing to take part. That tends to happen at present, but the School Meals (Scotland) Bill was

an example of a stage 1 debate being misjudged. I have not suggested that the paragraph be put in bold or made into a recommendation; it is an observation made in passing and a request for the bureau to do what it does, but to get it right every time if possible.

The rest of the changes to the section on accountability are textual and relatively minor. There are some points of clarification. I should have gone through the paper and marked up the substantive points, but I will flick through it quickly. I do not see anything more than tidying up. This section was quite easy to go through because there was not an awful lot that I thought needed to be changed. The next section needed a lot of changes, however—that made me stop at about half-past 5 last night.

Mr Macintosh: Thank goodness.

The Convener: You will get that next time.

Mr Macintosh: Have we reached paragraph 365 yet? Clarification is required on it.

The Convener: Sorry—I missed that. I rewrote paragraph 365, which is based on a previous paragraph. John Patterson had suggested some new text that incorporated material from the non-Executive bills unit.

Paragraph 365 refers to a growing concern in the Parliament about a specific problem. I am not saying that the problem will affect us now, because we are near the end of this session and have, somehow, largely agreed the bills that will be dealt with. However, now that we have almost reached the end of the session, it has become clear that with the appearance in the system of private bills, and with committees beginning to introduce their own bills, there could have been quite a severe blockage. Indeed, there is likely to be a severe blockage if the volume of Executive legislation remains the same in the future.

When we discussed this point, members mentioned that one of the difficulties was that there appeared to be a shortage of contract draftsmen, and the purpose of paragraph 365 is to reflect the response that we received from NEBU that that is not the case. NEBU claimed that people are being trained and that it did not expect the issue to pose any problems. Instead, the problem is that there will not be enough plenary or committee time to handle all the bills if they keep coming at their current rate.

As a result, in the very near future—certainly early in the next session—some criteria must be set out to direct NEBU on how it should prioritise its work and to help us agree which bills should be given priority in committee and plenary sessions. I have no answers to that question. Indeed, I am not aware that anyone has suggested any answers in

that respect. However, we should flag up such an important issue. The only conclusion that I have come to is that wide consultation should take place and that an agreement on the criteria should be reached as early as possible in the new session.

The SPCB and the Parliamentary Bureau are focusing on and discussing the matter, without anyone yet having a clear sense of what should be done. The big tension that is building up is that, if a lot of private bills are introduced, a lot of members' time will get locked up on matters that are not on their mainstream agenda and we will have to respond to the not necessarily unimportant imperatives of people who are outside the conventional parliamentary system.

In addition, if committees undertake post-legislative study and decide that they want to introduce amendment bills, or if many of the proposals that members have worked on in this session that have not come to fruition are introduced for consideration early in the next session, severe blockages could occur. NEBU has said that, if we give it an unlimited amount of money, it could draft any number of bills that we want. However, that is not the answer. The question is how we determine what gets through the Parliament and what we spend our time on.

Donald Gorrie: The Executive should be encouraged to spend more time on its bills and less time on self-congratulatory motions that do not really help anyone at all.

You sped on rather rapidly, convener. I wanted to say that paragraphs 346 and 347, which mention stage 3 consideration of bills, should also state that every member who wishes to speak on an amendment should be able to do so. You said that everyone who wished to speak in the stage 1 debate should be allowed to do so, but you did not make the same comment about stage 3.

The Convener: I did not say anything about paragraphs 346 and 347 because we went over them before and agreed that they would go into the report. We have not finalised them and obviously they are open to challenge, but I have no points to make about them. I am happy to return to those paragraphs if you wish.

Donald Gorrie: In general, the paragraphs are okay. However, I think that it is a principle of unicamerality that every amendment should be seen to be properly and fully debated.

The Convener: I was not sure that stage 3 merited that approach to the same extent that stage 1 merited it. After all, stage 1 consideration comes at the beginning of the process before anything is finalised. At stage 3, all the amendments have been discussed. Are you talking about the formal debate at the end of stage 3?

Donald Gorrie: No. I am talking about the debate on amendments.

The Convener: In that case, it is regrettable if we are excluding members from discussions on stage 3 amendments that are still to be decided. When I referred to stage 3 proceedings, I was thinking of the debate at the end. I will have another look at the paragraphs and separate out the two parts of stage 3 consideration. Perhaps we should have stage 3 and stage 4 consideration.

Mr Macintosh: I think that that process is called stage 2, is it not?

The Convener: No. Stage 2 is the committee stage.

Mr Macintosh: Is not the debate at the end of the committee stage also a stage 2 debate?

The Convener: No, the debate at the end is a stage 3 debate. There are two parts to stage 3. First, the Parliament sits as a committee at stage 3; then the Parliament debates the passing of the bill. They are both parts of the stage 3 process.

Donald Gorrie: How we prioritise members' bills is a tricky question. A possible way might be a back-benchers' committee or group. For example, the group could weigh up the issue of free school meals versus the issue of dog fouling.

12:00

The Convener: We will discuss that next time when we consider power sharing.

Paul Martin: I agree with Donald Gorrie that the Executive should not be involved in self-congratulatory motions. However, I think that, on balance, there is a time for Executive motions. For example, there was an effective debate on domestic abuse that allowed me, as a local MSP—and, I am sure, others—an opportunity to meet organisations after the debate and set out the Executive's agenda and views on various elements. That debate was not focused on a legislative process. There is a time for such Executive debates, but we should keep them to a minimum and ensure that the topics are relevant. I think that seven or eight times out of 10 the Executive gets it right and selects topics that are relevant to active issues in Scotland. However, the Executive should spend as much time as possible on legislation.

Another element is that members can introduce two members' bills; I wonder whether the system could cope if every back-bench member decided that they wanted to do that. There might be an issue from the outset about whether it would be feasible for each MSP to introduce two such bills. Perhaps that should be reduced to one bill per member to ensure that NEBU and the committees

can deal with the volume of work. I have experienced difficulties with members' bills; I was advised that it would be almost impossible to progress my member's bill because of the time that would be allocated to it, whereas other members have had two bills progressed.

Perhaps the feasibility of allowing members the opportunity to introduce two members' bills is dealt with later in the report. Perhaps we should reduce the opportunity to one bill to ensure that members can deliver a member's bill. There must be a democratic right for an MSP to be provided with the drafting resources that would allow them to deliver their member's bill. At the moment, because of time constraints and lack of resources, if an MSP cannot get help from an external resource to draft a bill, they face difficulties.

The Convener: That issue is addressed in paragraphs 372, 373 and 374, but I do not think that we should necessarily come to a detailed conclusion on it. We flagged up the issue and discussion about it is going on in the background. I suggested in paragraph 373 that the rule about MSPs being allowed two members' bills should be considered carefully by the next Procedures Committee, if it decides to review legislative procedures. Clearly, the system would collapse if every member introduced two members' bills. However, I have not introduced a member's bill, so somebody else can have my slot. Paul Martin can have it in the next session, if we are both here.

The question is not the number of members' bills that MSPs should be allowed but, given that there are members' bills, how the non-Executive bills unit should decide which ones to work with and how committees should decide which ones to go with. Clearly, if everybody introduces tonnes of bills, the whole system could grind to a standstill. Even with the existing volume of bills, which is far short of that situation, we find that the system is increasingly under pressure. We must find a way out of that.

Susan Deacon: I would like to pick up from where the convener left off, on the extent to which the system is under pressure. That is the simple message that we must ensure comes through loud and clear in our report.

During our previous outing on this section, I said that it was probably the section that I am most uncomfortable with in terms of not being able to see the wood for the trees. The changes that the convener has made are helpful, but they are still additions to what was already a long and detailed—arguably over-detailed—section. The section is now even longer. The danger is that we might lose the big message that we must send out loud and clear, which is that the system is to an extent over-pressured and overheated, that there is scope for error and that outside bodies sense

that. Nobody claims that there is evidence that, to date, the situation has impacted on the efficacy or quality of the legislation that has been produced, but everybody is ringing alarm bells about the potential for problems in the future if we do not turn the tide.

The urgency does not come through in the section because there is too much detail. In one paragraph—which I have lost—we kick the matter into touch a wee bit by saying that our successor committee should conduct a full review of legislative processes. That review could go on for a year or two years into the next parliamentary session. The urgent point must shine through in the report right here, right now before the new parliamentarians—I use the term in an inclusive sense to cover all 129 who are elected in May—walk through the door with all sorts of ideas for members' bills and the like.

In some respects, the message that we want to get across might be to do less, better—I think that I have heard somebody say that somewhere. Joking apart, there are four or five recurrent themes in the report, but the reader has to search for them. We know that they are recurrent because we have spent so much time on them, but anybody who reads the report will not know that. One theme, which applies equally to Executive and non-Executive bills, is that the system is overly pressured.

There is a danger that if we overemphasise the importance of initiating legislation through committees, we will put more pressure on the system rather than doing things better by prioritising and power sharing better. Another point is the need to prioritise, which also cuts across the Executive and non-Executive aspects. A further theme is the need for more time for consideration of bills, particularly at stage 2. Finally, there is the point about post-enactment legislative scrutiny.

Those are the four main themes. I would love the section to be stripped down substantially, but if it cannot be stripped down, I would like us to highlight those four themes. If we do not do that, our message will be lost. We will not have done our duty if we do not hammer home that message.

The Convener: We have a summary of recommendations, but you are saying that, at an appropriate point in the main text, we should have a summary that draws out the principal themes. We are bound to comment on everything substantive that people have said to us. Many people have made points and I want to respond to and deal with them. However, I accept the point about trying to highlight what we think are the bigger issues. I might have thought of that myself, but I am only halfway through dealing with the final section. Your comments are helpful and I will reflect on them. In principle, I am attracted to

doing something along the lines of what you have said.

Susan Deacon: Thank you. I feel better for having got that off my chest.

Donald Gorrie: If we can make the section briefer, that is fine, but it would be sad to lose specific proposals such as those about timing and stage 3.

The Convener: I do not think that there is much scope to make it briefer. Susan Deacon is asking for some way to see the wood despite the trees and to isolate the main trends.

Donald Gorrie: The more specific we can make the recommendations, the less time will be spent faffing about in the next parliamentary session deciding how to deal with the various problems.

The Convener: Okay. Do members want to raise anything else about the accountability section? It is not finished and I will have revised text for the rest of the section as soon as I can. I will e-mail that text to members. I do not know when I will get the power sharing done, but I suspect that it will be some time between the Christmas pudding and the shortbread.

We will leave that for now. Before Susan Deacon arrived, we went through the introduction and there was broad agreement. However, a number of nuance points were raised. If we take on board those points, it is reasonable to incorporate the new text into the draft and on to the web version. I stress again that that is open to be challenged if anybody is unhappy with anything. However, if we can agree that, it would be helpful. It gets us closer to the point of having a document that we can use for the final clearance session early in the new year.

We move to Donald Gorrie's report. We will not bother with the reports from Fiona Hyslop or Gil Paterson, because those members are unable to be with us today. Donald Gorrie raised points that we have not yet discussed.

Donald Gorrie: I think that there was some support for my proposal that there should be

"a Civil Servant designated as the link between the Executive and each committee, to provide factual information, guidance on the Executive's point of view and constructive advice to the committee."

Members thought that that would be helpful.

Mr Macintosh: I agree with that.

The Convener: There was a general feeling that the proposal was a good idea.

Donald Gorrie: Members did not mention part B of my report. The concept of a minister's surgery to which MSPs—either singly or in groups—could come and discuss issues with ministers might save a lot of time on written questions.

The Convener: How do members feel about making a suggestion to pilot that idea or to reflect on good practice? For example, Ross Finnie used to have regular meetings with relevant MSPs during the foot-and-mouth crisis. The meetings were simply an opportunity to discuss issues. A couple of civil servants, nominated by Ross Finnie, had additional meetings about individual concerns and that seemed to work well. We could throw up some text that showed that as good practice and ask for it to be piloted in other departments.

Mr Macintosh: There are all sorts of informal mechanisms by which ministers are available. I do not find ministers to be unavailable. It is a case of getting the balance right between formality and informality. I would like to hear from the Executive, although I imagine that it is so time-pressured that a set surgery might be a bit tricky. A pilot scheme or reflecting on best practice are not bad ideas.

The Convener: We will ask the Executive to contribute some thinking to the evolution of best practice.

Susan Deacon: Any of the suggestions that we adopt ought to be badged in terms of good practice or practice that should be explored. That is not to say that I am in any sense uncomfortable with the suggestions; I just think that their downfall could be that they are over-prescriptive, which might produce unnecessary resistance.

There is much agreement about the general principles. As Ken Macintosh indicated, the idea of set times in part B of Donald Gorrie's report is over-prescriptive. However, the point is that it is horses for courses; I doubt whether anyone on either side would object to the general principle of there being a bit more of that. Not being overly prescriptive also applies to part A.

I cannot remember whether I said this at committee before, but that was exactly the system that we started to put in place in the health department during the latter stages of the time when I was Minister for Health and Community Care. The system was very practical, because so much business was emanating from the committee and ending up in different parts of the health department. There was no gateway to the department and things were being lost and not chased up properly.

There is a practical dimension, which is perhaps not incorporated in Donald Gorrie's wording. Having a link person would be helpful to oil the wheels of the process. If we are not overly prescriptive about the exact model, big strides forward in good practice could be made, which the Parliament and the Executive could embrace, without too much exchanging of letters and views.

12:15

Donald Gorrie: Point c) suggests that civil servants should feel more able to contact MSPs when they are preparing answers to parliamentary questions or letters, to clarify what they are on about. I have found out several times by circuitous routes that the civil servant is genuinely confused about what I am on about, which reflects badly on me. Rather than waste lots of time speculating, civil servants should be able to contact us. As I understand it, the rules rather discourage them from contacting us in that way.

The Convener: I do not know how often that has happened in practice. Nobody has ever come back and said that any question that I have asked or any letter that I have sent was not sufficiently clear and I have not detected that that was the case from the answers. It has been suggested to us quite frequently in our meetings with the Executive that questions' not being clear is a substantial problem and that it should be resolved. The Executive seems to want to act through the chamber desk rather than deal directly with the MSP. I am not sure why civil servants should go through the chamber desk, rather than just sort out the problem, especially given that we have agreed the convention that we can go to a civil servant for an explanation of something. It seems a bit strange that that does not work in both directions.

Paul Martin: I agree with that. Donald Gorrie is saying that he would enter into the spirit of direct contact with civil servants, but some members would ask, "What is the minister's game here and what is he trying to find out?" Some members can be—

The Convener: Members are tricky beasts.

Paul Martin: Some can be suspicious of direct contact with a civil servant. They might wonder whether the civil servant is trying to gather intelligence on the meaning of their question. In the context of what Donald Gorrie suggested, direct contact makes sense, so why should not we make direct contact? I have been frustrated in the past, because civil servants have advised that they cannot make contact with members on issues that members have asked about directly, but which are not related to questions. They have said, "I appreciate that, but I cannot discuss this with you."

The Convener: Can you not discuss issues with the head of the civil servants' section?

Paul Martin: No, there is difficulty with that. In one case, I wanted to speak to the director of finance in the health department and I was advised that I should refer my inquiry to the minister and that he would prepare a reply. That was not related to a question, but to an inquiry.

Members can see the double barrel to this. We have to be vigilant that members enter into the spirit that direct contact is made for good reasons and that it is not for the civil servants to gather intelligence or to say, "Why is my minister being asked this question? It is my job to be protective of him and ensure that no one is trying to trip him up." Direct contact could be seen as harassing the member into releasing information that they perhaps do not want to release.

The Convener: If the member wants an answer to the question that is perhaps fair enough.

Paul Martin: We have to consider how members could perceive direct contact. Let us face it; what I have described happens and there would be the opportunity for it to happen.

Susan Deacon: I am not happy with point c) as it is currently phrased, although I agree absolutely with the spirit of it. Let us be honest; there is a problem in that as politicians we oscillate in the extent to which we are willing to sit around the table with each other and the extent to which we are across the table from each other. It is sometimes difficult for us to know which mode we are in, never mind those who work for or with us. I therefore have some sympathy with civil servants who are, shall we say, cautious about whether they can engage and what they should divulge in a conversation with an MSP. That caution is not necessarily rooted in a deliberate desire to obstruct.

Conversely, as Paul Martin has indicated, there are MSPs who would not want to have such a cosy relationship. Some of the comments that Richard Lochhead made last week were in a similar vein. Such a relationship might compromise MSPs' capacity to scrutinise and be critical of the Executive.

There are, therefore, two sides to the anxieties surrounding this issue. Because the letter of Donald Gorrie's proposal is not something that we can all buy into, there is a danger that the spirit of the proposal will be lost and I do not think that it should be.

There is something here about encouraging more effective liaison and sharing information and taking a more open approach to communication between MSPs and civil servants. I might be wrong, but I am not sure that there is something that prohibits such conversations taking place at the moment, although the wording that Donald Gorrie proposes almost implies that there is. Perhaps there is a self-denying ordinance and certain conventions at the moment.

I appreciate that Donald Gorrie is suggesting an alternative convention, but there needs to be a bit more work done to the proposed wording so that it is in the right form. It could be knocked down by

the defence that there is nothing to prevent what is proposed happening at the moment. If we are serious about moving the issue on, and if Donald Gorrie has an alternative formulation of words that is a wee bit more open ended when talking about improving liaison or communication, we might make more headway.

I would also like to know what the factual position is. I do not think that there is anything that actively prohibits that contact at the moment.

The Convener: It is not so much about whether there is an active prohibition as about whether that contact happens. All that is in place is the agreement that MSPs are entitled to use the Executive's directory and are entitled to ask civil servants factual questions if they are routed through the relevant head of section.

Other than that, nothing is authorised, so they do not do it. That might be more how it works or does not work. If a civil servant were to go to a politician and say, "What did you mean by that question? I am really struggling to find an answer", that is probably not prohibited, but they all know not to do it.

That is why, if a civil servant has a concern, they will go to their opposite numbers in the Parliament—the chamber desk, which is the Parliamentary civil service—and ask them if they could approach the member, rather than approach them directly.

Susan Deacon: That is where I believe that the recommendation is inadequate, although I do not disagree with the spirit of it.

There are other ways that dialogue takes place. We are talking as if civil servants are the end stage in the questioning process, but ministers are really the end stage. Every answer to a Parliamentary question or every letter is signed or authorised by a minister. A lot of that checking is done at the behest of ministers, sometimes by their own hand as politicians and the information is given directly politician to politician. Sometimes it is given through private ministerial offices. My sense is that the amount of information exchange is increasing as MSPs become more familiar with the private office staff and vice versa.

I make the point again that things are moving in the right direction. As I have said when talking about previous recommendations, if we were to capture the spirit of what Donald Gorrie is seeking to achieve but pass back a wee bit of the ownership to those that need to make it happen, we might make more real progress. We can be prescriptive and say that we want better and more open liaison between and access to civil servants and MSPs.

The Convener: We could give that as an example of a broader picture.

Susan Deacon: Yes, and then perhaps ask the Executive to come back with suggestions on how those relationships could be more actively enhanced and developed.

The Convener: That would be a good issue to ask the Executive about, sticking with the example of a broader picture, because it is an example that the Minister for Parliamentary Business and her office have picked out as an operational difficulty for them. We could ask them for their suggestions and place the matter in a wider context.

I have never had any minister come to me and ask, "What's this question?" Sam Galbraith once asked me, "Whit ye askin aw thae questions for? Who's giein ye these questions?"

Susan Deacon: There were no swearie words there. It could not have been him.

The Convener: No, he did not swear. It takes nationalists to get Mr Galbraith to go over the top.

Donald Gorrie: Point c) in the first section of my paper proposes

"a convention that Civil Servants could, where it would be helpful, contact MSPs".

I emphasise "could": that proposal is not prescriptive. No minister or civil servant has ever contacted me in any form about a written question. They have frequently merely failed to answer the question. I am quite happy for somebody to reword that proposal, but it says what I want it to say.

Point d) follows on from that. I suggest that the Procedures Committee could act as a referee when MSPs feel that a minister has not answered a question properly at all and when a minister feels that a particular MSP is getting at them and there are hundreds—sometimes literally hundreds—of harassing questions. I suggest that the aggrieved party, whether the MSP whose question has not been answered or the minister who is being unduly harassed, could appeal to us and we would try to resolve the matter by mediation or, if necessary, tell somebody to do better.

The Convener: I am pretty unhappy with that suggestion, because it is an entirely false position for the committee to be put in. On the first instance—the answer that is not an answer—I have had many questions that have not been answered adequately. That presents me with the choice of whether to pursue it or not to bother. Sometimes, I do not bother because the issue has moved on. If I have not been given an answer and want to pursue it, I ask a "further to" question. I have never found any difficulty in eventually getting an answer.

I remember Henry McLeish giving me a one-word answer—no—on something. I was really angry about that. It was an answer, but it evaded

all sorts of stuff that was in the question. I lodged half a dozen questions and eventually got detailed answers. Whoever gave me the "no" ended up having to do an awful lot more work than they would have done in the first place if they had given me a proper answer.

If a member is determined to get a response, they will get it. The ministers do not duck the questions. They may have a bad day and give a member a flippant answer, but if the member is determined, they will get the answer.

The reverse is far harder. How can we possibly judge that a member is harassing a minister? What is harassment? Asking an admissible question is not harassment, but it may mean that the department concerned has to do a huge amount of work. Susan Deacon could perhaps talk to us about the volume of questions that the health service gets and got when she was the Minister for Health and Community Care.

Members are concerned about issues and will ask lots of questions about them. It is difficult for us to sit and judge those questions and say to one member, "Your questions are all right," but to another, "Yours aren't. You've asked too many questions," or, "Your questions seem to us to be aggressive or combative." I might strike down a huge volume of questions that member X asks, but I will not allow you to drag member X's name from my lips. I might agree with what you say about specific cases, but I do not see how the committee can be expected to step in, say that a member is asking too many questions and tell them to stop it or disallow the questions. I do not see how we can allow the Executive to come to us and say that it does not want us to pass the questions on.

I suggest respectfully to Donald Gorrie that, if we sat here today with 300 questions that the Executive wanted us to rule out because they were harassing the minister, he would be outraged that the Executive was ducking answering the questions. That would be a wholly false position for us to be in. I do not see an answer to it. The Executive has a real difficulty with the volume of questions, but I do not envisage and never have envisaged a way in which we can help it to deal with that. It is just a fact of an active Parliament with lots of busy people who want to get answers.

12:30

Paul Martin: I agree with Donald Gorrie in the sense that we must consider ways to ensure that questions are answered. A good example would be a question that asks a minister whether he or she would meet a group of fishermen to discuss an issue. That might not be the whole question, but it would be part of the question and the minister's response would not deal with that

specific point. That would be a response that blatantly does not deal with the question. The Presiding Officer should have a role to ensure that the question is answered. On many occasions members do not ask explicit questions, which does not help the minister. Questions often make political points or the member grandstands a point, which means that the question gets lost. However, some members raise very specific questions and they do not get answered. That is frustrating and must be dealt with. There is a role for the Presiding Officer, rather than for a referee.

I agree with the point that the convener made. Were the Executive to ask us to referee the large volume of questions coming forward because a minister feels that a member is harassing or pursuing them that would be difficult to deal with. I have always believed that members have a democratic right to ask as many written or oral questions as they want. The Parliament has not prohibited them from doing that, but it has been suggested that there may be other ways of capturing the information that they require.

We have to consider ways in which we deal with the issue of ministers who evade the question. However, we must face the fact that we all do that. We should not say that it is only ministers who evade questions. We are all politicians and when it suits us we evade questions or maybe forget what we were asked—whether it is a school party that asks what an MSP earns—and look for various pieces of information. We must be clear about that and that will happen in the chamber, but I think that it is the role of the Presiding Officer to ensure that the questions are dealt with. I would not support any other proposal.

The Convener: The case that you mention of not getting an answer to detailed questions often arises in oral questioning. Sometimes members are to blame, because they ask so many questions that the minister can decide which part of the overall question he or she will answer. If a member gets caught that way, they do not have huge scope for complaint.

Susan Deacon: I am loth to look back too much on when I was on the other side of the divide, but on this matter it is worth noting that Sarah Boyack and I between us answered close to half of all parliamentary questions in the first two years of this Parliament. I perhaps speak with a tad of authority, although the world has moved on since then.

I think that proposal d) is, to say the least, unworkable, but underpinning it is a point of substance about the frustrations that people on all sides—I use the phrase “all sides” to embrace ministers and so on as well—have with the parliamentary question system. Ian McKay from the Educational Institute of Scotland used a

phrase in his evidence to us that encapsulated the drift that has taken place. I paraphrase, but he stated that there have been more and more nit-picking questions from members and more and more defensive answers from ministers over the life of the Parliament. There is an issue to be addressed. We have touched on the matter in earlier parts of the report. I think that proposal d) is not a way forward.

If it does not do so already, the report ought to state that there should be a focused piece of work on the operation of the parliamentary questions system. We need to unpick some of the issues. Some types of question lend themselves to precise answers. It is obvious that precision should be required where it is possible. A question asking how many people have been injured in road accidents on the M8 in the past 12 months—do not ask why I pick that example—seeks precise information that can be got through the PQ system. However, the further that people move away from that precision, the more inadequate the PQ system becomes, both for questioner and answerer.

From the thousands of questions that I answered in my time, I recall that I would often get questions like, “What action is the Executive taking to implement the report on the future of nursing in Scotland?” The original report might have been 300 pages long; the implementation process might involve a cast of thousands and goodness knows how many task forces. One would end up answering with a sentence that said, “A range of work is currently under way to implement this report.” Such an answer adds nothing to the sum total of human knowledge, but I challenge anybody to say how a meaningful answer can be given to a question that has a format like that.

If members are serious about eliciting information—as opposed to simply wanting to trip up or expose the minister in some way—they will find other ways of eliciting that information more effectively. I hope that part of the Parliament’s maturation process will be a greater willingness on both parts to find better ways of eliciting and sharing information. That takes us full circle back to the previous discussion.

In essence, I think that proposal d) is neither possible nor desirable. If our report does not already do so, we must ensure that it recommends that there should be a focused piece of work on the operation of the PQ system. We and our successor body will keep coming back to the issue. If we are not careful, we will spend more and more time counting questions and measuring response times without ever improving the system fundamentally.

The Convener: Ian McKay said that our PQs were in the “Westminster style”, with an approach

"that might be described as politically motivated questions and obfuscated replies from civil servants".

He did not mention ministers, but their replies must obviously be worse than obfuscated.

It seems that there is not too much sympathy for the text that Donald Gorrie has provided, but members agree with some points.

Donald Gorrie: It is a good suggestion that we should have some research on how well the system works. Being a bloody-minded person like the convener, I just lodge more questions if I get a duff answer. That is a waste of everyone's time. I was trying to be constructive with proposal d).

Proposal e) makes the point that Paul Martin raised about the need for the Presiding Officer to have a more active role. In no way do I criticise the current Presiding Officer, who sees his role as being to conduct Parliament correctly and ensure that things work effectively within the Parliament. However, he does not think that it is any part of his duty to ensure that ministers produce good answers to written questions. We need an advocate, as it were, for the Parliament in the on-going debate with the ministers and civil servants. The Presiding Officer could be a sort of tribune of the people, who would speak up on our behalf and was encouraged to do that more than the Presiding Officer thinks that he can at the moment.

Susan Deacon: Wearing his other hat, will the convener clarify whether the Presiding Officer is already empowered to do that? Whether or not he or she chooses to be more active in that role is another matter. Surely the issue is one of practice rather than of rules.

The Convener: I am not aware of the situation regarding written questions, but for oral questions Sir David has regularly pointed out that the standing orders do not allow him to specify that answers should be relevant. From time to time, he has tried to suggest that they should be a bit shorter.

I recently heaped praise on Mr Speaker Martin for a similar initiative in the House of Commons. Dialogue takes place to try to stop behaviour such as a member asking the First Minister a question and getting the party manifesto as a response, which burns up an awful lot of time and keeps out other people. We try to keep answers brief and we try to keep questions brief, which is sometimes just as difficult, because members want to preface their questions with other stuff.

The Presiding Officers have no control over relevance. Other Parliaments have standing orders that require answers to be relevant, and perhaps we could do some work on that.

Written questions are a minefield. I see duff questions and duff answers in the written answers

report. I also see answers in which ministers are not as forthcoming as they should be. Many of those answers fall into the margins of non-departmental public bodies and agencies. An answer might say, "I have asked so-and-so to reply," and so-and-so's reply is not always awfully impressive.

Presiding Officers would not have the time or the resource to comb through all that and to sort out members' practices or ministers' answers. As a questioner, if I wanted to pursue something, I could pursue it and receive a response. That might be through a letter rather than another question. Replies to letters tend to be better than those to questions. Before I became a Deputy Presiding Officer, I never felt inclined to ask the Presiding Officer to step in. I wonder whether that role is realistic. There are many written questions and many potential complaints about answers.

Susan Deacon: Donald Gorrie's paper just talks about fair treatment.

The Convener: Something will come up in a debate. Recently, in a debate on Peterhead prison, SNP members were agitated about something that Jim Wallace had done or said. An explanation was given and a point of order was raised. We agreed that more information would be provided, and Jim Wallace subsequently wrote to me, because I chaired the debate, and to the other members involved. I do not remember the detail of the matter, but it was clarified.

When something crops up in a debate, a Presiding Officer might ask the Executive to look into the matter and to clarify what was done and said and why. In that way, a role such as that described is undertaken, but other than questions, I am not sure what proposal e) refers to and what is being sought. I am not sure how deeply involved the Presiding Officers should be in a relationship that is primarily between members and ministers and is therefore for them to sort out.

Is Ken Macintosh pressed for time?

Mr Macintosh: I am afraid that Paul Martin and I have a committee meeting that starts at half-past 1 this afternoon.

The Convener: Is Susan Deacon willing to wait a bit longer?

Susan Deacon: I can stay until 1 pm.

The Convener: We can continue until 1 pm, as we will still be quorate. Other members will be able to read what we said in the *Official Report*.

Susan Deacon: A meeting with just me and Donald Gorrie will be dangerous. I suppose that the convener will curb our worst excesses.

Mr Macintosh: I apologise for leaving now.

The Convener: Does Donald Gorrie want to say anything else about proposal e)? I am not sure where we should go with it.

Donald Gorrie: I just wanted to put down my ideas on the Presiding Officer's role. If people do not like them very much, they can say so.

Stage 1 of bills has been dealt with. I am concerned about stage 3 amendments. I accept the convener's point that the general debate reheats cold kale, but everyone who wishes to speak to amendments should be allowed to do so and the timetable should be advisory, rather than compulsory. We are criticised about that. We have no House of Lords, so we must get legislation right.

The Convener: The point has been made that, at stage 3, members often make their points for the record and votes are determined by party whipping. We must believe that the activity is geared towards some purpose and that something might be said that will cause somebody to reflect on the fact that a problem exists.

I feel uncomfortable about members not being called to speak to their amendments but I do not feel remotely uncomfortable about chucking somebody out of the stage 3 debate. It is just too bad if you have reached the end of the time allocated for the debate without calling everyone. However, amendments are talked through to exhaustion in committees and the same principle should apply when the Parliament meets as a committee in the chamber.

12:45

Donald Gorrie: The timetable should be for guidance; it should not be statutory.

The Convener: We said something about the timetable, but we will see whether the wording needs to be tweaked to reflect what we have been discussing. I had not picked up on the fact that you were making a point about the different parts of stage 3.

Donald Gorrie: Sorry. That was my fault.

Recommendation 39 is that

"the Parliamentary authorities should review time-tabling arrangements with a view to allowing the Presiding Officers maximum freedom in allocating time during Stage 3 proceedings."

That wording might be okay.

The Convener: The intention is always to allocate enough time. However, sometimes the time is misjudged. We do not have scope to depart from that too much.

Donald Gorrie: You should have scope to be more flexible. That is the point that I am getting at.

I made the point about the need for more informal discussions with witnesses at committees

because I think that, based on my experience of a couple of bills, such discussions could bring together pressure groups and ministers and allow them to discuss which points they agree on, which points they do not agree on and which would therefore have to be dealt with as amendments to the bill. That would help to oil the wheels of the process.

The Convener: Do committees work as an entity in that regard? Would a committee, as a body, know how it wished a bill to be amended?

Donald Gorrie: It might not. However, I have often found that if one raises an issue in an amendment on behalf of an interest group, the minister says that it is a nice idea but that he does not agree with the wording of the amendment. It might be useful if the interest group and the minister could deal with such issues at an earlier stage. It is not a big deal, but I think that there is scope for informal meetings. Indeed, this committee has had some useful informal meetings.

The Convener: I should point out, for the record, that those informal meetings were not with ministers.

Susan Deacon: I suggest that the insertion of "members" into Donald's suggestion would be useful. If his point is not already in the main report, it would be good to weave it in somehow. Anything that oils the wheels of the process is inherently a good thing. More often than not, suggestions and proposals fall by the wayside because of lack of time rather than lack of will. However, a lot of informal discussions take place already. The extent to which that happens depends entirely on the issue, the individuals involved and the time available, but we may as well recognise that that is part of the normal meat and drink of politics.

I share the convener's anxiety about the notion of committees holding informal discussions. When does an informal discussion become a private meeting? I do not think that that is what Donald Gorrie intends to happen—that would take us into another area of deliberation, of course. It would be helpful if we were to acknowledge that it is possible to thrash out many issues more effectively as part of a free-flowing dialogue outside formal meetings.

The Convener: Should we view Donald's suggestion as an extension of the previous suggestion that the minister might have a meeting with people who were interested in the next stage of the bill, rather than involve the committee?

Donald Gorrie: Perhaps.

Susan Deacon: There is a wee bit of a lesson in here for other discussions. The initiative could come from a range of different areas, depending on the issue. That happens already.

The Convener: Yes. The committee could ask the minister to have a meeting and, rather than make it a committee meeting, the minister might say, "Yes, I would like to meet the committee and, by the way, could we also throw in the Scottish Council for Single Homeless?" Such a meeting might also involve whoever else is in touch about aspects of the bill. It could be done in that way. A minister could have a meeting that is for a purpose and is recorded, but which is not part of the formal proceedings and does not raise huge procedural issues. That might be very helpful. We could turn it round that way, perhaps.

Donald Gorrie: That is a constructive suggestion.

Susan Deacon: The key issue is the theme that runs throughout this discussion. We do not want to be over-prescriptive for all the reasons that we have discussed previously—not least because one size does not fit all. We want to give a strong signal about encouraging a more free-flowing exchange of ideas and dialogue that will—to use Donald Gorrie's phrase—generally oil the wheels of the process. That means trying to drop our guard on one side a little and lay down arms on the other side a wee bit more as well. I am happy about offering a range of mechanisms through which that might be achieved, as long as people have control over what would be most appropriate in a given situation.

Donald Gorrie: I am keen to change the deadline for lodging motions and amendments, which is a specific issue. The system does not allow for adequate democratic consultation if motions can be lodged two days, and amendments one day, before a debate. Whether they are Executive or Opposition motions, they should be lodged at least four working days before a debate—the period could even be longer than that. Fiona Hyslop made a strong point about that, and she might want a longer period. It should be four working days for a motion and two working days for an amendment. That would allow each party time for discussion.

There are often three things to discuss—a motion and two amendments—and it may be a moot point whether a party should support one of the amendments. The members of that party should have the chance to discuss whether to do so.

The Convener: Often, the lodging of amendments may work its way round to a party striking an attitude or commandeering the time that is allocated to the mover of an amendment, as opposed to that allocated for an introductory speech.

Susan Deacon: I am conscious of the issue of time. The principle that we are discussing has

been accepted enthusiastically by the committee. However, none of us has a monopoly over or the absolute answer—if such a thing exists—to what could or would be the right time limit to lay down. Everybody wants the process to be highlighted and recognised. The whole basis of parliamentary activity—the level of debate, individual contributions, external organisations' capacity to contribute and influence the process—would be enhanced by knowing further in advance what business will be dealt with.

However, I sense that there is still an outstanding question about how far in advance that could realistically be done. There is also agreement that there must always be provision for topical business to be discussed. I am partly asking whether we have grasped the issue already in the main report.

The Convener: There is some wording in the report—I refer to bits of the power sharing section—that I was going to do more work on, which I have not yet done. I would allow—

Susan Deacon: Can the clerk give us a paragraph number off the top of his head?

The Convener: No. He is not that good.

John Patterson (Clerk): Paragraph 577.

The Convener: "Hear, hear," say the rest of the clerking team.

I propose to let what we say about the issue inform the wording of the power sharing section.

Donald Gorrie: So long as the—

The Convener: Susan Deacon rightly pointed out that it is not important that we specify four days but that we say that longer notice should be given and that the ability to allow topical business to be discussed should be retained. I suspect that that would not happen often enough to justify change. People do not like change.

Donald Gorrie has a point to make about the back-bench committee.

Donald Gorrie: That is a big issue and we would want more members to be present when we debate it.

The Convener: Yes. The mood of the previous discussion indicated that there would not be unanimous recommendation in favour of Donald Gorrie's suggestion. We should skip that point and come back to it at the end of the process when we will be able to sort it out.

Donald Gorrie: We have discussed the question of bills versus motions, but more time should be given for oral questions in the parliamentary programme. An issue was raised in another paper about brigading questions into

groups. More pressure is put on ministers if a succession of questions is put to them over a period of half an hour or so. Brigaded questions could be put to ministers less often than weekly. At the moment, a scattergun approach is taken to question time. Questions are a big issue.

The Convener: Departmental questions should be put on a rotating basis. That would mean that every five or six weeks or so, the minister for X would discuss his or her portfolio. We would separate that question time from First Minister's question time. At the moment, the hour that we spend on question time on Thursday afternoon makes it difficult to do much with the remaining time that day, yet we can find that we have too much time on a Wednesday. We could balance the time allocation better and have better question times. The questions that are not for the First Minister tend to disappear below the parapet in terms of coverage or media coverage—no one gets much out of them.

The system would still be at the mercy of members who, if there are transport questions, will want to ask about the bypass in their constituency instead of focusing on sustained questioning about, for example, the railway franchise or the big headings in the roads budget. It is not possible to legislate for that, but it is possible to give people the opportunity to get in some sustained questioning.

It might work better if there were brigading of questions. If there are 50 questions for question time we are lucky to get 20 questions in. However, if the Presiding Officer is able to look at the questions and decide that there is scope for a good discussion around a couple of themes that run through several questions, he could decide to prioritise them. We could operate question time that way. We are not very far down the road, so we would have to consult widely before we came up with specific recommendations. What I have said is not a canvassed view but my personal reaction.

Susan Deacon: I share many of the views that the convener expressed, including the view that question time could be much improved if questions were to be subject specific or minister specific—education questions could be given one date, health questions another and so on. That question was toyed with at the beginning of the Parliament. I suspect that the current system was opted for because of the newness of everything and everybody. I sense, however, that there is now willingness to revisit the subject.

We have touched previously on the length of speeches—I sense that many members are frustrated with the mechanistic and formulaic approach that has evolved. The key point for the committee is to capture and be clear about our

view, which I think is unanimous, that much could be done to improve the operation of business in the chamber, which would enhance and improve the operation of the Parliament. In order to justify the subject's inclusion in the report, I suggest that improvement of the operation of business in the chamber would enable us more effectively to fulfil the wider CSG principles. If it does not already exist, we need a conclusion from the committee that we believe that as much as possible should be done to enrich and improve the balance of business in the chamber.

In addition—I will be guided by the convener on whether this is right—we should ask specifically that the new Presiding Officer, as one of his or her earliest acts, co-ordinates an exercise to introduce early changes to chamber procedures in order to address some of our concerns. We could include some of our specific concerns; for example, the length of speeches, the balance between Executive and non-Executive business and the member's motion point that we discussed.

Am I right in saying that the new Parliament will be elected in May and that the Presiding Officer will be appointed shortly thereafter?

13.00

The Convener: The Presiding Officer will be appointed within a few days of the election.

Susan Deacon: Many of the areas under discussion ultimately fall under the preserve of the Presiding Officer. I realise that changes to standing orders might be required. However, I feel that the Presiding Officer might be the right person to progress that work over the end stage of the spring term, but with a view to introducing some early changes that would be effective from after the summer recess.

Beyond that, there might still be some on-going work, for example, if changes to standing orders are required. However, I like to think that a new Presiding Officer would act quickly to change some of those parliamentary procedures immediately after summer recess. If he or she does not, we will get locked into many practices that will in time become set in stone. We should at this stage of devolution be fluid and flexible so that we can consider whether procedures work as intended. We should also consider whether they are a useful experience, either for those who participate in or for those who observe and listen to our activities.

The Convener: There are overarching recommendations in two areas, as well as many recommendations for the next Procedures Committee. The two main recommendations are that bill procedures should be considered in the round and that questions and answers should be

considered. Within that, and before absolute revolutionising of the landscape in either area, we have distributed two questionnaires on members' attitudes to chamber time and business. The responses suggest that there is a degree of flexibility in some areas but not in others.

It is possible for the committee, without necessarily coming to any conclusions, to do more work and research before the election to inform the incoming Parliament and Presiding Officers. The committee could set an agenda that could be pursued in relation to allocation of time. That would require changes to standing orders, but they might be relatively minor and non-contentious changes that would loosen up some existing procedures. It could make what we are doing more flexible and user friendly, but still allow completion of the major reviews, which will inevitably take longer. That is all achievable. I cannot say what the outcomes will be, but we can put those matters on the agenda.

At the beginning of the new Parliament, we should probably point the research at the SPCB and ask it to draw it to the attention of the new Presiding Officer for immediate discussion with all interested parties.

Susan Deacon: I want to pick up a point. I would not support the point about the parliamentary programme, which is slightly different to the point that is currently being discussed; we should not engage in a full discussion on that now. However, I would refer the matter to the on-going work of the Standards Committee on the role and operation of cross-party groups. From that committee's preliminary discussions, I suspect that the recommendation would not attract much sympathy. In fact, one of the Standards Committee's concerns, and what prompted it to examine the operation of cross-party groups, is the confusion that has arisen—sometimes by accident, sometimes by design—between cross-party groups and bona fide parliamentary committees. The concern is that the outside world often perceives cross-party groups to have formal status and composition within the Parliament when that is not the case.

Therefore, although it is not for me to speak for the Standards Committee, I suspect that based on the progress of that discussion, its members would not be sympathetic to a measure that would allow cross-party groups to have equivalence to parliamentary committees. In any event, in process terms, we should feed that view to their work.

The Convener: I am conscious that several bills have been introduced by co-sponsors. If a group of MSPs want to introduce a bill, one of them must be its member in charge. The other members can, of course, be identified and recognised in debates.

I do not see that this lends much to the role of MSPs in the process, but it elevates the status of the cross-party groups. I am not a member of many cross-party groups, but those of which I am a member are very different, were born of different motivations and serve different purposes. I am, therefore, not sure that a one-size-fits-all approach to elevating cross-party groups would be appropriate. Tough and strict criteria, which might prove to be uncomfortable for their members, must be set for cross-party groups.

Donald Gorrie: I am happy to abandon that proposal.

The Convener: The previous proposal contains the back-bencher reference and, therefore, will have to be considered with the other back-bencher proposals.

Donald Gorrie: Yes. It must be taken with the references to back benchers and timing. My last proposal refers to anti-bureaucracy, which is a big issue for three people to try to discuss in the minute that we have left.

The Convener: Yes, it is. We will hold our discussion on bumf busting until the next committee meeting. My thanks to everybody, especially the fatigued parliamentary staff who sit wilting at the bottom of the table, for having listened to the discussion and written it all down.

Susan Deacon: They do not even get a mince pie.

Meeting closed at 13:06.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, 375 High Street, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Tuesday 14 January 2003

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY EDITIONS

Single copies: £5

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

Single copies: £3.75

Special issue price: £5

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.

Published in Edinburgh by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
Edinburgh EH3 9AZ
0131 228 4181 Fax 0131 622 7017

The Stationery Office Bookshops at:
123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ
Tel 020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394
68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD
Tel 0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699
33 Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ
Tel 01179 264306 Fax 01179 294515
9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS
Tel 0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634
16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD
Tel 028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401
The Stationery Office Oriel Bookshop,
18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF1 2BZ
Tel 029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

The Stationery Office Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information
on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament,
their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0870 606 5566

Fax orders
0870 606 5588

The Scottish Parliament Shop
George IV Bridge
EH99 1SP
Telephone orders 0131 348 5412

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers