PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 18 March 2003
(*Morning*)

Session 1

£5.00

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 18 March 2003

PROCEDURES COMMITTEE
7th Meeting 2003, 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

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Hugh Flinn (Scottish Parliament Directorate of Clerking and Reporting)
Janet Seaton (Scottish Parliament Resource and Information Group)

WITNESSES

Colin Miller (Scottish Executive Legal and Parliamentary Services)
Fiona Robertson (Scottish Executive Legal and Parliamentary Services)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

John Patterson

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Anne Peat

ASSISTANT CLERK

Lewis McNaughton

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Procedures Committee

Tuesday 18 March 2003

(*Morning*)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:33*]

Parliamentary Time

The Convener (Mr Murray Tosh): Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the seventh meeting in 2003 of the Procedures Committee. Barring the unforeseen, this will be the last meeting of the committee this session. We have a relatively brief agenda, which is a welcome change.

The first item is on what we are loosely calling a legacy paper, which will convey to our successor committee our thoughts on the shape of the parliamentary week. As the clerk does not wish to say anything by way of introduction, I open up the matter for discussion. The nub of the paper is the set of options at the end for reconfiguring the parliamentary week.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I thought that the discussion paper was a fair summary of the position and of the various options. The only thing that I was keen on but which has been left out would have come in paragraph 36, which concerns the timetabling of stage 3 consideration of bills. The paragraph should recommend that the timetable be advisory only, but that the Presiding Officer should try to finish the overall debate within the allocated time. There should be some flexibility; there have been occasions when one bunch of amendments has been squeezed heavily, while the next bunch has been gone through quite quickly.

The Convener: There tends to be pressure on the amendments in the early and middle stages of stage 3 proceedings, and the debates appear to run out of momentum later on, presumably because a lot of members' points will have already been made earlier. We tend to find that time is made up towards the end of proceedings.

The debate on whether to pass the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill took about 55 minutes, despite the fact that only 30 minutes had been timetabled. That was of benefit to the many members who spoke in that debate. It was possible to call all those who wished to speak because of time gained, yet earlier in the stage 3 proceedings, there was severe pressure on one grouping of amendments in the middle, which spanned lunch time. We got away with that only because a couple of people significantly reduced the length of the comments that they had planned to make, in the knowledge of that pressure on time. I think that proceedings would be easier to manage were the timetable indicative, rather than obligatory. That, however, is a matter for our successor committee.

For the benefit of members who have just arrived, Donald Gorrie has suggested that, in paragraph 36 of the discussion paper on time in the chamber, we should add a suggestion that the timetable for stage 3 should be indicative and that it should not have to be strictly adhered to. That would allow the Presiding Officers to allocate more time should particular groupings of amendments take longer to consider than expected.

If members have any other opinions on that, now is the opportunity to make them. If not, their opinions on any other part of the paper are welcome.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I have a couple of small points to make, Presiding Officer.

The Convener: Presiding Officer?

Mr Macintosh: I mean convener—or sir.

Paragraph 39, which is the first paragraph in the part of the paper that deals with First Minister's question time, says:

"the Presiding Officer suggests that FMQT should be extended to 30 minutes and that he understands the proposal to command widespread support."

In paragraph 41, we point out that, in fact, that proposal does not command widespread support. We might as well take the latter part of paragraph 39 out, in which case that sentence would read:

"Following the experience of Aberdeen in May 2002, the Presiding Officer suggests that FMQT should be extended to 30 minutes".

It would be misleading to retain the wording:

"he understands the proposal to command widespread support"

when we know that it does not.

I am slightly worried that some of our suggested discussion points might be viewed as recommendations.

The Convener: The paper will go to the successor committee and it will be up to the members of that committee to make recommendations. They will be free to accept what they want to accept and to reject what they do not want to accept. I would not worry about anything in the paper appearing to be over-directional. It is not being discussed in the

chamber, and I do not think that it acquires any momentum in the sense that you suggest.

Mr Macintosh: Paragraph 47 relates to the idea of having ministerial question sessions, and says:

"There was some support for this".

Was there some support for that? I thought that, by the end of our discussion, we were all against the idea.

The Convener: I do not think that we resolved that question. I would not say that a majority of members were for the idea, but there was some support for it.

Mr Macintosh: I agree that the idea was expressed that we should pilot the proposal to see how it went.

The Convener: Paragraph 47 also mentions "concern", so it tries to be balanced.

Mr Macintosh: The whole paper is about timing. Paragraph 6 of our draft annual report, which we will consider at the end of the meeting, discusses our consultative steering group report. It says:

"The report also maps out areas of future work which it considers should be given priority such as: legislative procedure, subordinate legislation, parliamentary questions, Sewel motions, the further implementation of equal opportunities in the Parliament, and specific recommendations to help develop procedural transparency."

That is a more comprehensive list of what we might wish to pass on as legacies, rather than the discussion paper on time in the chamber. The discussion paper is good, but there are other issues that we might wish to mention as a legacy.

The Convener: The whole CSG report is a legacy. The legacy paper is a specific paper that the committee asked to be drawn up to consider issues surrounding the shape of the parliamentary week. It is quite focused and is an attempt to concentrate the successor committee on considering those issues and coming up with some early suggestions, which would, of course, be entirely that committee's responsibility.

Mr Macintosh: So, rather than being the sole legacy paper, the paper is one legacy paper, and we are leaving the CSG report and other recommendations as part of our legacy.

The Convener: Indeed. Papers on on-going work and preparations for anything else are also legacy papers.

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I am generally comfortable with the legacy paper, not least for the reasons that we have been talking about. As it will be up to the successor committee to decide what to do with the paper, we do not have to agonise unduly over the detail.

However, one area ought to be strengthened: paragraphs 27 to 30, which form the section on speaking times in debates—I note also that that section does not feature in the summary of issues at the end. Every time that we have covered the issue in the committee, we have been united about the need for greater flexibility in parliamentary debates. That is not about allowing members to give long, rambling speeches, but about addressing the rigidity of the four-minute speech. I have been struck by the fact that, ever since we conducted our survey on the matter, I have picked up a lot of noise around the system about it.

I will share a wee anecdote—perhaps other members feel the same. When Westminster had its most recent major debate on Iraq, we had business in the chamber. A number of us were around the tea room at the time, and I lost count of the number of members of different parties—with different views on the substantive issue that was being debated—who said, "We just couldn't have a debate like that because of the constraints on our debating time." Members recognised that—they said it.

We have not quite captured the committee's view or the uniformity of our opinion that greater flexibility is needed within debates, not only on the questions that are addressed in the preceding section of the paper—about the nature and subject of debates and whether we should vote on motions—but on the timings for speeches in debates. We cannot and should not be prescriptive. There is no consensus view on the matter. However, we have lost that point. It needs to be brought back into the paper in the section on speaking time and in the summary, if members agree.

Donald Gorrie: I agree. In a previous discussion, the point was made that, through party loyalty, several of us had spoken in debates because nobody else seemed to want to speak, and, on other occasions, had wanted to speak and were not able to or had not been allowed to speak for nearly as long as we felt that we could contribute effectively. The straitjacket of the two or three-hour debate should be much more flexible. If the Executive wishes to advertise some nice, new glossy production, it is fair enough that we have a debate on it, but that debate need not necessarily go on for terribly long for members to give the ritual support or abuse to the document. However, major issues need more time. I would support some sort of statement, along the lines that Susan Deacon suggested, that there should be a greater degree of flexibility.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I have a number of other points.

The Convener: We will stick with speaking times just now.

09:45

Fiona Hyslop: I refer to paragraph 34 on timing. The matter comes back to the notice given to members of debates. The problem with paragraph 34 is that it contains a sentence that talks about "the deadline for motions". That is a separate issue and inappropriate to paragraph 34, in which we talk about flagging up when a subject is coming up for debate. Just now, through the Executive's goodwill, I have an hour and a half's notice on what is likely to come up in a fortnight's time. Had I two or three days' notice, I could trawl to ensure that we have notes of interest, and we could be flexible.

We should learn from the experience of when the lights went out and the sound went off in the Parliament. It was remarkable that we managed to do our business and save two hours. That shows that where there is a will, there is a way. If we have time, we fill it; if we are under pressure, we can still secure business.

That comes back to the idea of short term, medium term and long-term timetabling. We should tie into that. We may know that an issue is of great interest and, because we need a big chunk of time, we can ensure that we expand the time available, especially if we are talking about earlier starts or later finishes on the Wednesday. Just now, we have a big chunk on Thursday morning only, in which we can get three hours—possibly four at a push—on a subject.

I would like to see something in paragraph 34 that would allow us to bring back in from the CSG report the need for more than an hour and a half's notice for the parties to assess how much interest there will be in a particular subject to ensure that we can say, "This one looks as if it will be really important. We need longer for it from beginning to end." That would also enable us to say that we thought that another debate should be six minutes long or whatever was thought appropriate. I suggest that that might be a way forward on the matter. I have other points on other matters, but that is it on speeches.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): When we discussed speaking time previously, we also discussed the survey in which members said that they wanted more time in the chamber but did not want to give anything up for that additional time. We need to deal with that. I have never been opposed to the principle of considering extending the time available, but I have always had difficulty with that issue if members are not willing to give and take.

On deciding priorities, it will always be the case that a priority for an Opposition party will not necessarily be a priority for the Executive. I appreciate that Iraq is a different issue—it is a priority for the country and all the parties. However, a priority for the Executive might be additional time for a transport statement, which might not be a priority for the Opposition parties.

I have some difficulty with how we clarify what is a priority for everyone, because we will not all agree. In the real world, we will not all join hands and say, "This is our priority: we all think that, in two weeks' time, we will want to discuss transport." The Opposition parties might rightly consider other issues to be priorities.

I do not know whether I can move on, but the summary in the paper says that we should consider using Mondays and Fridays for additional members' business debates—that is, for plenary time. I do not recall us discussing that possibility. I may have missed such a discussion, but I do not recall us suggesting that Monday afternoon and Friday morning slots be used to accommodate plenary business, and I do not recall agreeing that to be a priority.

The Convener: I am not sure. I do not think that the paper implies that we agreed to that. We can make that clear.

Paul Martin: I do not even remember discussing it.

The Convener: We did not discuss the use of Mondays and Fridays for members' business. We discussed the use of those days for committees, to allow for more plenary debates on Wednesdays.

Susan Deacon: I have a point of clarification on something that Paul Martin said, about which I feel quite strongly—he may have picked up my point wrongly. The reference that I made to the Westminster Iraq debate was not about prioritisation of subject matter. In saying that members said that we could not have such a debate, I was making a point not about the subject but about the flow of the speeches within the debate. My point was about the fact that there was flexibility about the length of time for which members could speak. I want to be absolutely clear on that. It is a different point.

Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP): That is the very point that I was going to make. The priority will be decided by those who call the debate, whether they are from the Executive or the Opposition. We all know that there are debates in which a lot of people want to be involved, and the problem is that there is not enough advance notice. Even at present, if enough notice is given, the extension that we are likely to get might be an hour if we are lucky. We need to open that up.

Listening to the television last night, I was struck by comments on the likelihood of a debate at Westminster today going on until 6 o'clock, 8 o'clock, 10 o'clock or even longer. The difference

between Westminster's system and the way in which we structure our debates makes us look like kids at play at times, as people are constrained by having to say something meaningful in four minutes. They may want only two minutes to say what they want to say, and then sit back down. In Westminster, some members do that in a couple of minutes, but some need a long time because they are painting a complicated scenario. That is what is wrong with our debates.

We need to focus on the notice that is given. We all know which subjects are likely to command a large number of speakers. I have already referred to that, and it happened yet again in the debate that we had last week. There are two things that we know for a fact give members cause for concern. First, they may know that they will not be able to participate in the debate because they are not in the party speaking lists. Secondly, they are not likely to make a noise about that, because they obviously have an eye on the party. There are constraints within a party, and you cannot become a rebel overnight.

We need to free up that situation. The existence of a list for the convenience of the Parliament and the Presiding Officers means that they are complicit because, as I have already said, they take those lists but do not look behind them. If party speaking lists are to be provided—there is probably a good reason for them—and if the time constraints remain the same, there must also be a limit on the lists to free up time. If we stick to having just an hour for big debates, the Presiding Officer must look at the lists and cut them down a bit to free up time not just for back benchers but for other members. Even front benchers who do not cover the relevant portfolio may want to contribute, so we need to free up the system. The best way in which to do so is to extend time for the big debates, which would allow the party speaking lists to prevail and everyone to get a fair shot at speaking.

The Convener: Without raking over last week's debate too much, I want to mention the fact that I was conscious of calling three people whose names had not been submitted by their parties. I dare say that, had it been an absolute free for all, I might well have called more. There may have been an element of unrecognised and unaddressed demand.

Notwithstanding the four-minute constraint, it was an excellent debate with many excellent speeches. I will not single out any one in particular, but I remember one three-minute speech that was really very good and got quite a bit of coverage in the press. Although I am a supporter of longer times for speeches, speakers can actually make a point very effectively in quite a short period of time. In a sense, such debates are more demanding than the debates at Westminster, which give members the luxury of talking for much longer. We should not confuse length and quantity with quality. The Scottish Parliament did itself rather proud last Thursday, and the quality and tone of the debate, within our current constraints, were impressive.

Mr Paterson: I would like to clarify one point, just in case I made any mistakes in my earlier comments. You are right, convener. People can make very meaningful contributions in a short space of time; there is no doubt about that. I concur with your view that extending individuals' speaking time does not mean that we will actually hear something meaningful. I know of some people who would probably make me walk out when they started to speak, because they ramble on. It is horses for courses: sometimes you need a bit longer, but sometimes you need only two minutes.

My main argument is that debates are constrained by the system of party speaking lists, which constrains the number of people who speak. I just wanted to make that clear.

The Convener: I recognise that.

Mr Macintosh: I echo your point, convener. Susan Deacon used the word "flexibility", which was echoed by Donald Gorrie, but I am not sure that that is exactly the word that we want. We are talking about flexibility of response or flexibility for the Presiding Officer. We agreed that back benchers do not have enough time and that four minutes is not long enough. That is one point on which we agreed unanimously. As Paul Martin pointed out, nothing else wants to give, and there has to be discipline. In the Iraq debate, which was constrained by many factors, the self-discipline imposed by the speakers was also notable and was made to work to their advantage, as they made their points very well.

I would like to give an example from about three weeks before the Iraq debate. I had put my name down in advance to speak in a debate on a report by the Justice 2 Committee, and I was called in the wrong order—by mistake, I assume. I had been toiling to get my speech done. I had written it far too long, as usual, and had cut it back to four minutes, but I was then told, just before I stood up, that I had only three minutes. I then had a choice between losing sections of the speech and trying to make the same speech in less time. I have to say that I was not very pleased with what I said, as I précised my speech and it did not satisfy me at all.

In my view, that experience illustrates the fact that members need to know in advance whether they will be given four minutes or six minutes. You need a rough idea, so that you can make a rough

call, and there must be some guidance ahead of time. On a subject such as Iraq, we could have known in advance whether we would have five-minute or six-minute speeches. That would have been a fairer way to handle it. That is the sort of flexibility that I want, rather than simply the flexibility to speak ad infinitum.

The Convener: Sometimes the difficulty is that the Presiding Officers give a time in advance but, as the debate progresses, they find that they have lost a lot of time. They then have to make a judgment between reducing the time, and therefore being meaner to the later speakers than they were to the earlier ones, and cutting people out altogether. If you had been offered in advance the choice between speaking for three minutes and being cut out altogether, you might have gone for the three minutes. It is a hard one to call and there are limits to the flexibility that can be exercised.

Paul Martin: I do not support party speaking lists, but I understand that they are helpful to the Presiding Officers. I do not know whether that is really the case.

The Convener: They absolutely are helpful. They give an indication of how many people are likely to want to speak, so we can make a calculation about timing and running order.

Paul Martin: As I said, I do not support the party speaking lists, but it is obviously an issue for the Presiding Officers. I think that, in a modern Parliament, members should be given direct access to the Presiding Officers to indicate whether they want to speak. I am not sure whether Westminster operates a system of party speaking lists; I think that there is a direct approach to the Speaker and his deputies.

The Convener: We agreed with you on that in the report on the CSG principles.

Paul Martin: One of the issues that I want to revisit concerns the crystal ball that tells us whether or not everyone will want to speak in a debate in two weeks' time—I plead that we be realistic about that. Announcements are made every day that can dictate how popular a debate will be. For example, if there was to be a debate on health and it was announced that a hospital was being closed because of a superbug, a great deal of interest would be generated in that debate. We cannot always rely on a crystal ball that will tell us whether every member will want to speak on a subject in two weeks' time. The length of time that has been allocated to some debates has been increased, but there has been no take-up by members. What we do is dictated by events that go on around us; I say with the best will in the world that that is true of everything that we try to do.

The situation is a wee bit like the winter shutdown in football: every team wanted it, but when they got it people said that they did not want it any more because it was making the leagues lose money.

Fiona Hyslop: There is empathy with the business managers.

10:00

Paul Martin: People meddle with systems and say that suggested changes—when they are made—sound good. However, when we start to enforce such changes, people say that what has been done is not what they had expected. Gil Paterson's point was well made: Why does this Parliament not sit for long hours, as members do at Westminster? It is because we said from the outset that we did not want to be like Westminster; we wanted to be a family-friendly Parliament in which parents would rightly have the opportunity to share time with their children and be able to fit their work around the school holidays. I appreciate what Gil Paterson said—there is an argument for extending a debate into the late hours of the evening, but if we put that suggestion to all the members of the Scottish Parliament, it would receive a clear rebuttal.

I keep repeating the point that in the real world, although it sounds great at the time to meddle with things, it does not work when we attempt enforcement. There is a need to fine tune and improve arrangements, but the proposal in question is not the way forward.

Susan Deacon: It is worth noting that the Scottish Parliament has been around for considerably less time than the Scottish Premier League, although I hope that it will be around for much longer. The important point is that the Parliament is new and that is all the more reason for testing out different ways in which to do things. I agree with Paul Martin that those different ways of doing things might not work, but we will not know unless we try. The danger of not being willing to experiment with our practices and procedures is that the existing procedures will become set in stone for decades or even centuries to come, as has happened in another place.

We should be relaxed about the prospect of testing different practices, which would also mean that we must be willing to admit that changes have not worked and that the original arrangements were better. I would be very concerned if we were not willing to try new ways of doing things.

Fiona Hyslop: We should change the reference to "business managers" deciding party speaking lists to party managers, as we did in the report on the consultative steering group principles. It is not always business managers who decide party

speaking lists. In the Scottish National Party, the whips submit the party speaking lists.

Last week's Iraq debate was an SNP debate, which was held in Opposition time. Even if we had wanted a longer debate, we were entitled to only three hours. That raises a practical issue: if members of all parties want a longer debate and the Opposition has used up its share of time, from where can we get extra time? There is a case for flexibility in parliamentary time, so that we can pull in extra time.

More than half of the SNP group wanted to speak in the Iraq debate; I am sure that the situation was similar in other parties. Not every member's name was submitted directly to the Presiding Officer, although that practice should be encouraged and I am glad that the CSG report makes such a recommendation. A party might well want to structure its argument and its case. That makes sense, but it should not preclude other members from making speeches if the Presiding Officers want to bring them into the debate.

On the issue of flexibility and obtaining more time, an extended slot on a Wednesday is a possibility, especially if we started earlier on a Wednesday after lunch. That would allow us to have long substantive debates. We would not want to do that often, but we should ensure that the opportunity exists, should we need it. We should emphasise that such use of time would not be general practice, but would apply only in circumstances in which there was a clear demand for a longer debate.

We have shied away from shaving time off opening and closing speeches. We should mention that in the paper.

The Convener: We could not shave time off closing speeches.

Fiona Hyslop: No. Closing speeches are very tight at the moment but, especially in relation to longer debates, the present formula is too generous, so we should include mention of that in the paper. Members who make opening speeches—I do not get to do that very often these days—would not necessarily be opposed to that.

Donald Gorrie: Paul Martin made a point about Mondays and Fridays. The first point in the summary of issues has slightly telescoped that. It should say, "More use of the Monday afternoon and Friday morning slots for committees to allow more time to accommodate plenary business."

I am sure that that is what was meant, but the present wording could be read differently.

There is also a public relations point in relation to paragraph 11, on the normal parliamentary week, which says:

> "Monday 14:30 to 17:30: Members' travel and constituency time … Friday 09:30 to 12:30: Members' travel and constituency time".

Paragraph 2.2.3 of standing orders actually says:

> "The Parliament may … meet on any sitting day".

It goes on to describe the normal parliamentary week. The 2.30 to 5.30 slot on Monday and the 9.30 to 12.30 slot on Friday are potential parliamentary meeting times. It is misleading to suggest that those times are for members' travel and constituency time. We get enough flak without unnecessarily giving ourselves more.

Mr Macintosh: I was going to take Monday morning and Friday afternoon off after reading that.

The Convener: Do you have something more to add on that point, Gil?

Mr Paterson: No, I wanted to deal with the point that Paul Martin made earlier. He was right to point out that paragraph 39 should be cut short. It should say, "The Presiding Officer suggests that FMQT should be extended to 30 minutes", and end there.

The Convener: I agree with that. I have bracketed the relevant part of the sentence. That was Ken Macintosh's perfectly fair point.

Mr Paterson: That is part of a basket of options on that point, which are listed in paragraph 40, that we might give to different people. Paragraph 40 means that, if we consider the issue in the round, a period of 30 minutes might come into play.

Fiona Hyslop: The extra time would not be for the leaders of the Opposition parties; rather, we would use the 30 minutes to encourage back benchers to get involved.

Mr Paterson: Back benchers are being constrained at the moment.

Susan Deacon: I have a point that does not relate to the substance of the paper, but is a suggestion about methodology. We could suggest that there is a need for more qualitative research on the issue. Although the surveys are useful, they are quite limited in the responses that they provide. Focus groups—dare I use the phrase—of members could give constructive output on some of the issues. No Procedures Committee will have a monopoly on perspectives on the matter and we will not capture effectively the views, insights and suggestions of members through paper-based tick-box surveys. If other members of the committee are comfortable with it, we could suggest that part of the next committee's on-going work should be to seek to get interested members to take part through seminars, for example.

Paul Martin made the point about knock-on effects and about how something that might seem

like a good idea does not work once its consequences are worked through. An iterative approach is necessary to make progress on such issues and I suggest that we incorporate such a suggestion in the paper.

The Convener: We have had a good summary of points, additions, qualifications and clarifications. That should allow us to finalise the paper and to pass it on. I assume that members will be happy for me to sign off the paper. It will not go anywhere, except to our successor committee.

Members *indicated agreement*.

Standing Orders

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of a brief paper from Donald Gorrie, who wants to discuss some proposed changes to standing orders.

Donald Gorrie: There are three points at issue. The first two proposals relate to the same point and are about the general principles of bills. Nowhere is it defined what the general principles of a bill are. Recent examples have shown that it is quite possible to support the general principles of a bill—whatever that concept is—but still to think that the bill should not be progressed. There could be a motherhood and apple pie bill, stating that we support motherhood and apple pie. Nobody could be against that, but if such a bill were to state that it is compulsory that we eat apple pie for lunch every day, we would be against it.

There have been various examples of such situations. Tricia Marwick introduced a bill about using a different voting system in local elections. It was possible to support the general principles of that bill, but not the particular way in which she approached the matter. The general principles of the proposals in a bill about how to deal with debtors could be supported, but not the particular proposals.

As I understand it, the Education, Culture and Sport Committee felt that the principle of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill was good but that the bill should be changed so that it would apply to the whole of Scotland rather than only to part of Scotland. That totally alters the proposal.

I suggest in annexe A of my paper that in the debate at stage 1 a member

"may propose a Reasoned Amendment that the Bill should not be approved and set out the reasons why, notwithstanding the general principles of the Bill, it should not progress."

I also suggest in annexe A of my paper that standing orders should state:

"Whether or not the Committee recommends agreement with the general principles of the Bill, it may recommend that the Bill should not be passed and give its reasons, or indicate those parts of the Bill which it considers need significant amendment."

The current system is not satisfactory and something along the lines of what I suggest would be more logical and sensible. Does the committee want to discuss that proposal? The next two issues are separate.

The Convener: We will discuss that proposal. Hugh Flinn has joined us. I ask him whether, as things stand, the chamber desk would accept as admissible a reasoned amendment along the lines that Donald Gorrie's paper suggests.

Hugh Flinn (Scottish Parliament Directorate of Clerking and Reporting): I apologise, convener. I have come to the meeting prepared for the next item, so I will have to refresh myself on that point.

The Convener: My understanding is that a reasoned amendment to a stage 1 motion would be perfectly admissible. I cannot think of any examples offhand, but I am sure that there must have been stage 1 amendments that have done something similar to what Donald Gorrie suggests. I cannot think why such an amendment would not be admissible. As I understand it, what currently happens is that the member in charge—usually the minister, but in the case of a member's bill it is the member who promotes the bill—lodges a motion asking that the Parliament approve the general principles of the bill. I would have thought that it would always be competent for a member to lodge an amendment that says that Parliament approves the principles of the bill, but argues that it should not be introduced in this session or whatever. I see that Hugh Flinn has cottoned on to what we are talking about.

Hugh Flinn: Yes. I apologise.

The convener is correct. The critical point about reasoned amendments to stage 1 motions is that they must make it clear either that the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the bill or that it does not. Subject to that, it is perfectly in order for a reasoned amendment to a stage 1 motion to add other things; whether they be expressions of particular areas of concern about the bill or suggestions on other courses of action.

The Convener: Donald Gorrie's concern is that he wants it to be made clear that a member can express approval of the general principles of a bill but can still, nonetheless, block its passage because of circumstances, reasons or calculations that would be included in the reasoned amendment. An amendment could state, for example, that we agree with Tricia Marwick's Proportional Representation (Local Government Elections) (Scotland) Bill, but that we do not agree to pass it at the moment, pending the arrival of an Executive bill.

Hugh Flinn: I would have thought that that would be possible, because the Parliament would have agreed to the general principles of the bill.

10:15

Susan Deacon: I have a concern about the way in which we are approaching the discussion. Many of the aims and aspirations in Donald Gorrie's paper and the intentions that underlie it are ones that most of us would be sympathetic to or, at the very least, open minded about. However, I am not convinced that we can drill effectively into some of the technicalities through this exchange of views. I realise that the problem is that this is the committee's last meeting but, in the normal scheme of things—if the committee had been continuing to meet—I would have requested that Donald Gorrie's paper be accompanied by a paper from the clerks to test out the questions that the convener has put to Hugh Flinn. Is the best that we can do today to commission such work for the future? I do not see how we can come to conclusions on some of the points at this stage.

Donald Gorrie: I did not envisage that my proposals would be nodded through and become law tomorrow. If there was sufficient interest in the proposals and it was not thought to be completely daft to make those suggestions, the matter could be considered further.

The Convener: There is scope for further work on the first two proposals. My immediate reaction, when I looked at the proposals before the meeting, was that Donald Gorrie was not seeking to introduce anything new, but I think that we need to be clear about whether that is the case. We could kick the points about and get a report back to the next committee.

Donald Gorrie: First, I think that somewhere in standing orders it should state what "general principles" means. Secondly, it is logical that a member should be able to state in an amendment that they support the general principles of the bill, but oppose the bill. My understanding, from people who are involved in such matters, is that there has been fierce resistance to that from whoever resists these things.

Fiona Hyslop: There must be somebody resisting such changes.

The Convener: We might be working along some of the fault lines that exist within the coalition.

Donald Gorrie: I think that there were other problems. I would like the committee to agree that the points should be examined.

I will mention briefly my other two suggested amendments to standing orders. One arose from the Executive's lodging at stage 3 an amendment to the Local Government in Scotland Bill about management of fire boards, which was a very controversial issue. A number of us approved of the proposal, or might have been persuaded to approve of it, but were totally opposed to the way in which it was introduced. There should be a rule that states that totally new issues cannot be introduced at stage 3.

My final point is, perhaps, idealistic. It might be helpful to state in words of a few syllables and in short sentences that the Presiding Officer has the right to cut members short. I know that the

Presiding Officers have that right, but to have it stated in writing it might strengthen it.

The Convener: We have covered the idea behind that point within the CSG report; there is work being done on that.

We might want to kick around the suggestion that new issues—which have not been debated at stage 2—should not be admissible at stage 3. I am not sure about admissibility. I understand what Donald Gorrie is saying; it cannot be wise to introduce substantive issues late in the day without consultation because to do so will immediately give rise to charges of bad faith and so on. However, I am not sure that it is wise to state that such matters shall not be admissible because we will then get into a debate about what constitutes a new issue. I do not think that standing orders define such matters.

Without having any elaborate model in mind, I can conceive of the possibility that a matter that commands substantial support might crop up late in consideration of a bill. One or two of our first manuscript amendments, for example, were issues that came up at the last minute; members said that the proposals sounded good and that they would like to include them in the bill.

If a proposal seems to be sensible and commands a lot of support, we would want to include it for debate at stage 3, so it would be a pity to fetter our discretion; a situation could arise at stage 3 about which we all wanted to do something. However, if we agreed to Donald Gorrie's suggestion, the introduction of a new issue would have to be bombed out. Perhaps the issue that needs to be addressed as a result of Donald Gorrie's proposal is the need for clear guidance on what is acceptable practice, rather than a rule on admissibility in the standing orders.

Donald Gorrie: It would be helpful if a paper on the issue could be presented to our successor committee.

The Convener: Are we happy for further work to be done on those points, and for a paper to be put to the next committee?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Parliamentary Questions (Non-departmental Public Bodies)

The Convener: The third item on the agenda is parliamentary questions and non-departmental public bodies—which is actually easier to say than the acronym, the order of which everybody gets wrong. We are joined for this item by lots of additional people. We have Hugh Flinn and Janet Seaton from the Parliament side, and from the Executive I welcome Colin Miller, the head of constitution unit in the constitution and parliamentary secretariat, and Fiona Robertson, from the public body and executive agency policy unit. It is interesting to find out that such units exist.

The substance of the report is a series of letters that have bounced backwards and forwards, and a paper that suggests an outline for possible agreement on the way forward. We probably want to hear from the parliamentary and Executive officials where this is going, what stage we have reached and whether we are ready to agree to the tentative co-operative procedure as the way forward. When the officials have spoken, we will have questions and discussion. Who will lead off?

Janet Seaton (Scottish Parliament Research and Information Group): I welcome the Executive's response to our suggestions. Although there are some issues that we need to continue to explore at official level, the clear implication is that members will be able to have more transparent substantive responses to questions to non-departmental public bodies that are judged to be on non-operational matters. That is a forward-looking step that will improve accountability in the long run.

The Convener: I should pass that immediately to the Executive side to comment.

Colin Miller (Scottish Executive Legal and Parliamentary Services): It would be fair to say that the Executive has no difficulty with the principle of the proposition; it is simply a matter of what the committee will find to be the most practical way of giving it effect. We regard two options in the paper that Janet Seaton prepared for the committee as being perfectly workable and practical. The basic objective is to find a way in which to get the substantive response from the relevant chief executive on to the parliamentary record. As far as the Executive is concerned, we see no difficulties in principle.

The Convener: Are there any questions or comments?

Donald Gorrie: To me, model 5.1—the executive agency model—is the most attractive because it is the most responsive. The

disadvantages of all four proposals are listed, which all seem to me to be quite similar from the point of view of the officials on either side of the divide—if that is the right word. Would the executive agency model produce much more work than the other three models?

The four models are the executive agency model, the "will write" model, the indirect high-visibility model, and the indirect low-visibility model. From the subsequent correspondence, the high-visibility and low-visibility models seem to be more popular than the executive agency and "will write" models. As a difficult MSP, I find model 5.1 to be much more attractive. Can you explain to me the downside of that proposal?

Colin Miller: One question is the transparency of the person who is accountable. When a question is passed from the Executive to the chief executive of an NDPB for an answer, that is done because accountability rests primarily with the chief executive. Therefore, would not it be more transparent if the response from the chief executive was published on the parliamentary record, rather than the answer from the minister saying, "Here is what the chief executive has to say"?

Donald Gorrie: I thought that that was what 5.1 meant. I am not suggesting that the minister should reply. If people ask questions about jails, for example, and the minister gets the boss of the jails to reply, that would be the reply to the written question, or the minister could say, "The boss of the jails has said X." Would not it be possible to say, "The boss of Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire has said X"?

Colin Miller: Yes, that model would work. Our preference is to use models 5.3 or 5.4 because they are slightly simpler processes, but there is no reason why what Donald Gorrie suggests could not work.

Fiona Robertson (Scottish Executive Legal and Parliamentary Services): The distinction relates in part to the fact that agency chief executives are directly accountable to ministers but, in contrast, NDPB chief executives are accountable to their boards, which in turn are accountable to ministers. That is where the distinction arises in the procedures for responses.

Donald Gorrie: I have an example. At a recent visit to a further education college, the principal of the college said that some of the rules that were imposed on it by the local enterprise company were extremely destructive: that is a public issue. I accept that the local enterprise company is a free-standing NDPB, but it uses public money. If that allegation is correct, the LEC is preventing the education system from delivering what it should deliver, and we should become involved in some way. I cannot quite accept the total independence of the chairman of whatever enterprise company it is.

Fiona Robertson: The local enterprise company, as part of the enterprise network, would be answerable to the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise. Any question about the local enterprise company would be directed through that route. For a further education college, the public body that is responsible for allocating funding is the Scottish Further Education Funding Council. On the issue that Donald Gorrie mentioned, neither the local enterprise company nor the further education college would come under the remit, because they are not NDPBs.

Mr Macintosh: Most MSPs will sympathise with Donald Gorrie's position on the difficulty of getting issues that we are concerned about dealt with in the system that we are used to, which is the question and answer system. The problem with models 5.1 and 5.2 is that by using ministerial questions, they imply that the minister has direct control over the bodies, when the minister does not have such direct control. It would therefore be wrong to use a system that encourages one to think that ministers control the decisions.

Although they are not NDPBs, local health boards are a good example. They make decisions that will be referred to ministers, but—as we have discovered to our cost in Glasgow—because the local health board makes the decisions, it is wrong to put to the minister, or to have responded to in the minister's name, questions on decisions that are not made by the minister. That is why model 5.3 is a good way forward—it gets the issues on the public record, but makes it clear that the answers come from the chief executive of the agency.

I have a separate question. I was encouraged by the list in the paper at the back, which contains a series of points.

The Convener: Is that the one with the blue tag?

Mr Macintosh: Yes.

I take it that I am right in thinking that the Executive and the Parliament have pretty much agreed to the bullet points listed in that paper as the way forward and that we are already some way down the line in negotiating those. One of the points states:

"The Chairman/Chief Executive of the NDPB replies within the agreed target, preferably using a standard form".

Is there any advantage in having a standard form? I am not sure why that would be the case, as I would have thought that the replies would be in the form of a letter.

Hugh Flinn: From our point of view, the advantage of having a standard form is that it would greatly facilitate the information technology processes that would be required to include replies in the written answers report. However, we are more than happy to discuss the details with the Executive to see what is most appropriate.

10:30

Susan Deacon: I want to make a number of general points. First, I continue to be concerned, as I have been since the beginning of the Parliament, no matter what position I have held, about whether we are striking the right balance between scrutiny and delivery. I am opposed to anything that puts unnecessary burdens on agencies that need to concentrate on using their finite resources to deliver a service or do a job of work. That is not to cast aside the need for effective accountability, transparency and scrutiny, but I worry that we might be considering only one side of the coin, which is the scrutiny process, without thinking about the opportunity cost that is involved.

In our other discussions and in our CSG inquiry—although admittedly insufficiently in that inquiry—we have touched on the impact that the existence of the Parliament and the questions that individual members ask have had on a range of different bodies. We need to be alive and sensitive to that issue. Let me be clear: I do not advocate that public bodies should operate behind closed doors or not be accountable. I say simply that a balance must be struck.

There are definitely pressures out there at the moment. I know that in the health service, which has been mentioned, a considerable amount of organisational energy and resource is sometimes being taken up just in the process of scrutiny. To be frank, I would rather see some of that time, energy and resource involved in service delivery. I simply note my concerns in that regard.

Secondly, although I share other members' concerns about the appropriate accountability channels for different bodies—there are interesting questions around the way in which further education colleges are constituted and there is a continuing debate about how health bodies should be constituted—I make the point that any system of parliamentary questions can work only within the existing systems of accountability. That should be self-evident but, in discussions such as this, we often find ourselves seeking to deal with what we see as the bigger shortcomings in the lines of accountability. However, to fix those problems, we would need to debate the substance of which lines of accountability should exist for particular bodies. Our approach should not be to twist, turn and distort a system of questioning so that it does something that is at variance with a particular channel of accountability. I feel that shades of that approach are coming through in our discussion.

Thirdly, we need to be aware that there may be a tension in what we seek to do. Most parties in the Parliament genuinely desire to ensure that power is effectively devolved to those who deliver services and functions. In other words, most of us favour putting into practice the principle of subsidiarity. Therefore, we must guard against our desire for bodies to be accountable to the Parliament running counter to that. The Parliament should not be more centralising either in substance or in tone. Increasing the accountability of bodies need not necessarily involve making them answerable to the Parliament. For example, local bodies could be made more accountable by enhancing the role of elected local authorities.

Having shared that philosophical meander, I would take a practical point of view. In line with what I said on the previous item, I am happy to move forward by testing other options to see how they work. Essentially, that is what the paper proposes. I favour any model that best fits the concerns that I have expressed.

I do not like the model that is proposed in paragraph 5.1. I feel that it would be particularly bureaucratic and would involve double handling, and I doubt that it would add value. I am attracted to a system that does not duplicate information but widens the sharing of it. If a body's chief executive is to reply to a member anyway, it strikes me that it would not require a huge amount of effort and resources to build in a reproduction system that shared that information as part of the parliamentary process. The paper proposes a couple of models that are variations of that.

I am happy to go ahead and test some of the options, but I hope that we do not lose sight of the much bigger challenges with which the Parliament is still grappling.

Paul Martin: I disagree with Susan Deacon, as I prefer the option given in paragraph 5.1.

Ken Macintosh referred to the health boards, which provide a good example of how responsibilities are shared. For example, improving the health statistics for Glasgow Springburn—or anywhere else for that matter—is a responsibility that is shared by the minister and the local health board. When I ask questions about what action Glasgow NHS Board is taking to deal with the high number of cancer deaths in Glasgow Springburn, I also want to raise the issue for the minister's consideration. There is a good argument that such responsibilities are cross-cutting.

If a response on cancer deaths in whatever constituency were placed in the public domain by being channelled through the minister, that would

ensure that the issue was brought to the attention of the minister and the local health board. That process could be helpful in ensuring the accountability both of non-departmental bodies and of Executive departments. I prefer the model in paragraph 5.1, as it would give greater opportunity to scrutinise departments.

I also want to touch on the cost of the questions, which is an issue that I feel strongly about and which the Executive has raised on a number of occasions. I do not think that we can win that debate. At the end of the day, we set up the Parliament to provide the opportunity for members to scrutinise the Executive and non-departmental public bodies, and that will cost us money. We need to be clear that scrutiny of any democratic body costs resources, whether it be at local government level or at parliamentary level.

The time scales for responses to questions have improved a great deal since the early days of the Parliament. As I recall, previously, some of us had to wait up to 10 months for various departments to provide responses to questions, but the time scales have improved a lot over the past 18 months.

In itself, that should reduce costs, as I am sure that it must have cost money to allow questions to go unanswered for some time. What happened was that, if members did not receive a response to their questions within the expected time scale, they would ask a duplicate question or other questions in and around their initial question. Perhaps it does not really matter which model we consider; if we tell members that we want to find ways of reducing the number of questions that are asked, that is fair enough. After all, members will always have an opportunity to ask questions.

I point out that some questions have been ridiculous. For example, there have been questions about catering facilities, and I recall a member asking whether air conditioning would be provided in the Parliament's canteen area.

The Convener: Was that a question to a non-departmental public body?

Paul Martin: Well, I wonder; members were raising such unnecessary questions in the early days of the Parliament. We cannot get away from the fact that resources will be required to answer questions. We must deal with that, but we must also consider ways of assisting members to ensure that they do not have to ask certain questions.

The Convener: We all agree that the resources need to be available.

Fiona Hyslop: I think that we should return to NDPBs, which are the subject of the paper.

If we pursued any of the models outlined in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.4 of the paper, what percentage of questions would be affected by the change? Moreover, can anyone give me an idea of the percentage of parliamentary questions that are asked of ministers that in effect are directed at NDPBs?

As a member, I can write directly to the chief executive of any NDPB. Indeed, none of the proposed models precludes such an approach. As a result, we should ask ourselves why we need to ask ministers such questions. That point touches on the issue of accountability that Susan Deacon raised. It is interesting to note that members can receive a quicker and more comprehensive response by writing to a minister than by writing directly to chief executives of NDPBs. That might be an advantage in itself.

We must also address the question of confidence. Sometimes, a member might want to write to a chief executive of a body, but might not necessarily want the reply to be broadcast to the world and the universe. For example, a letter might raise confidential issues that relate to a campaign or the member might wish to protect a constituent's interests on a certain matter. The models outlined in the paper take a more sophisticated approach to the reasons why members want to ask particular questions of ministers.

In summary, I want to find out the percentage of questions that would be affected if we adopted the suggested models. Furthermore, would they have any implications for the time taken? From an Opposition member's point of view, it is helpful to ask ministers particular questions instead of dealing directly with NDPBs. Finally, is there any way of protecting constituency interests if a member does not want a reply to be posted on a website or published until a suitable date, although I realise that that is contrary to the general principle of transparency that we are trying to pursue?

Hugh Flinn: I will answer the second and third questions, and Janet Seaton will respond to the question about percentages.

The proposal contains absolutely no suggestion that members' ability to pursue matters directly with NDPBs would be affected if they wished to take such a route instead of asking a parliamentary question. Because the matter would be pursued directly with an NDPB, it would not go through the parliamentary process. As a result, the proposed arrangements for publicising answers would not apply in such grey areas.

Janet Seaton: I carried out a spot check of a number of weeks and discovered that between 1 per cent and 2 per cent of questions would be affected by our proposals, which is about four questions out of 150 or 155 a week.

The Convener: Does Fiona Hyslop have any other questions?

Fiona Hyslop: Perhaps I am using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, but I want to raise a more fundamental question about the process of publishing answers. How do we ensure that health boards and so on are directly accountable to the Parliament instead of to the minister concerned? That is probably more a question for committees.

The executive agency model outlined in paragraph 5.1 of the paper is straightforward. After all, if only 1 per cent to 2 per cent of questions are affected, none of the disadvantages that the model presents, such as increased administrative burdens on parliamentary and Executive staff, would be horrendous. I suspect that, if I were the minister, I would want to keep a watchful eye on the issues that were being raised and putting pressure on certain areas. Such a model has advantages for both ministers and departments, and I do not think that the increased bureaucracy required to deal with 1 per cent or 2 per cent of questions would be inordinate.

10:45

Susan Deacon: For clarification, were questions about health boards or other NHS bodies included in the calculation that Janet Seaton carried out?

Janet Seaton: Yes.

Fiona Hyslop: I am surprised by that.

Mr Macintosh: The disadvantages of each of the models that are outlined in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 are not the reasons why we are not pursuing those lines. We are not pursuing them because the Executive feels that they do not reflect the lines of accountability. Indeed, Patricia Ferguson's letter outlines the reasons why we are not taking the approaches outlined in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2. Whether they increase, decrease or otherwise affect bureaucracy is neither here nor there; the point is that the proposal in paragraph 5.1 presupposes a direct line of accountability between ministers and the actions of NDPBs. As there is no such line, we should not take that particular approach. That is why we are adopting the model that is outlined in paragraph 5.3. Does that make any sense?

The Convener: I understand what you are saying.

Fiona Hyslop: If we follow that argument, the essential question is how we make NDPBs accountable.

Mr Macintosh: That is a different issue. Although I totally agree with the three points that Susan Deacon raised, they are more to do with accountability. This particular question is more about the transparency of the accountability that already exists. In response to Paul Martin, I suggest that if a minister is responsible for policy that relates to cancer levels in Glasgow, he or she should answer any questions on that issue. However, questions on issues for which the minister is not directly accountable should not be answered in the minister's name, which is why we have adopted the model that is outlined in paragraph 5.3.

The Convener: What Kenneth Macintosh has said is correct. The paper before us does not seek to resolve the debate on accountability, which has been part of the currency of political exchange over the past four years and has emerged as a significant area for further work in the CSG report. Instead, the paper simply addresses the relatively straightforward issue of how questions as they stand at the moment should be handled and how answers might be more realistically sought from the correct person or agency and placed on the public record. It is a tidying-up job, and the work that has been carried out and the agreement that has been reached are entirely sensible. We should proceed on that basis.

Of course, none of that precludes our successor committee or any other committee that has the matter within its sphere of competence from examining the accountability of agencies and NDPBs. We simply need to be realistic. The proposal is useful. I hope that the committee will agree to endorse it and invite officials on both sides to work through the remaining stages of the process and come up with a workable model that can be introduced by the target date specified in the paper. Are members agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Susan Deacon: I would like to add a point that might not have been considered by parliamentary staff and/or the Executive. I feel strongly that, after the election, there will be a need for good guidance to members about how to elicit information from NDPBs and so on. After all, such bodies come in many different shapes and forms. I know that the issue was discussed in various quarters at the beginning of the first session but was squeezed out, probably because of a lack of time and resources. Instead of organisations—executive agencies as well as NDPBs—bombarding members with information about whom they can contact and why they might want to contact them, or doing so via the Executive, members should receive additional guidance on the matter at an early stage. To the best of my knowledge, no such guidance exists. Surely that would help to oil the wheels of communication.

The Convener: Is the chamber desk reviewing guidance on questioning?

Hugh Flinn: We have reviewed the guidance on questions, but the issue raised is rather wider than that; it is more about sources of information.

Janet Seaton: We could consider the matter, but it is more difficult to give guidance on a huge area than it is just to say that SPICe has the facility and anyone can ask for the contacts that they want. I would need to know a bit more about what members are after, but perhaps that can be discussed separately.

Donald Gorrie: It is worth recollecting that most, if not all, parties entered the last Scottish election with a cure for the problem—abolishing all the NDPBs.

The Convener: That is not within the committee's remit, nor could it be fitted into the time that we have left.

I thank Executive and parliamentary officials for their attendance. We have managed to agree on the way forward.

Procedures Committee Annual Report 2002-03

The Convener: Item 4 concerns the proposed text of our annual report. Indeed, it will be the text of the annual report unless anyone wishes to bring up anything of burning importance that they would like to add or change.

Susan Deacon: Did we only meet 21 times? It felt like so many more.

John Patterson (Clerk): It felt like 121.

The Convener: If we are all happy with the report, it will be included with all the others in the appropriate document.

That brings us to the end of the meeting. I give members my usual thanks for their contributions and for all the work that they have done, for the friction that they have generated and for the constructive ideas that they have come up with. I also thank members and their predecessors for the humour and tolerance that they have shown over the four years for which I have been the convener. I have enjoyed being on the committee and I hope that other members have enjoyed it too.

I thank all our clerking teams—the current individuals and their predecessors—who have supported us well and have worked very hard, sometimes under trying circumstances, for example when I am still trying to proofread the report on Friday morning and it has to be at the printer by midday. I appreciate the work that you have done.

I also thank the people who we do not generally bother to mention—the sound engineers, the official reporters, the broadcasters, and the security guards. Our security staff are now world-renowned experts in the CSG principles, their application and their potential development. I understand that Mike Docherty is going on "Mastermind" and that is to be his specialist subject. The members are just the tip of the iceberg. A lot of people support us in our work and we tend to overlook that, so I thank very much everyone who has supported the committee over the past four years. I hope that the next committee is at least as much fun.

Mr Paterson: I endorse everything that you have said about all the people that you mentioned. We also thank you for the way in which you have convened the committee from the start. I thank you on behalf of everyone on the committee, and I thank you personally for the way in which you have handled me in particular.

The Convener: We will change the subject immediately.

Meeting closed at 10:53.

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 25 March 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 CF12BZ
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

Printed in Scotland by The Stationery Office Limited

ISBN 0 338 000003 ISSN 1467-0178