

SOCIAL INCLUSION, HOUSING AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMMITTEE

Wednesday 14 June 2000
(Morning)

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SOCIAL INCLUSION, HOUSING AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMMITTEE 22nd Meeting 2000, Session 1

CONVENER

*Ms Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)

*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

*Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

*Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab)

*Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING MEMBER ALSO ATTENDED:

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

CLERK TEAM LEADER

Lee Bridges

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mary Dinsdale

ASSISTANT CLERK

Rodger Evans

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee

Wednesday 14 June 2000

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 09:33]

The Convener (Ms Margaret Curran): In my customary fashion, I welcome everyone to the meeting. We have quite a session before us, most of it in private, because we will be dealing with a draft housing stock transfer report, but we have a few other items of business to deal with first.

I inform members that Martin Verity has now left the committee and is moving to work with other committees in the Parliament. I would like to put on record our thanks to Martin for his work as clerk team leader at a critical period for the committee in helping us to get established and to get going. I warmly thank him for his work and wish him well in the other committees he works with.

I propose that items 3 and 4 on the agenda be taken in private.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): Do you have any spare agendas, convener?

The Convener: Mary Dinsdale, the senior assistant clerk, has extra papers if anyone needs them.

We have already formally agreed that consideration of the draft housing stock transfer report be taken in private. Today's consideration continues that until it is finished. Are we agreed that items 3 and 4 be taken in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Petition (Sheltered Housing)

The Convener: Item 2 on the agenda is consideration of petition PE195, about warden cover in sheltered housing. Mike Russell is with us this morning. He has informed me that he is here to say a few words about the petition, and I ask him to do so now.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Thank you very much, convener. I shall be very brief.

Petition PE195 was received by the Public Petitions Committee, which discussed it some weeks ago. It was spoken to by Mrs Cathleen Hanlon. She has organised a substantial petition

and a series of activities in Irvine regarding the warden service and the community alarm service.

She speaks on behalf of the residents of several sheltered housing complexes and, at a meeting on Monday, it was confirmed that the 22 complexes of sheltered houses in North Ayrshire all support the work that she and her friends are doing, and are willing to sign both the petition and letters to North Ayrshire Council. They are also backed by relatives of many of the elderly people in the sheltered housing complexes.

The proposal is to change the present system of warden cover, particularly overnight cover, in those 22 complexes, into one whereby a community alarm system, an electronic system, is the default means of contact in case of emergency, with back-up from a very limited number of wardens. Those wardens would be based in one or two complexes, or would possibly be based centrally. The proposals are still under consideration. It is the view of all those involved in the complexes that that would not be a better system in terms of safety and health, but a cheaper system, which is why it is being put in place.

The system also has substantial critics elsewhere in Scotland. There are many concerns, and there are documented cases in which individuals have been unable to use the electronic device to call for help. Examples include people who have had fits or seizures and have been unable to move or speak. The system operates using a small device, which is pressed, and a voice box, by which speech can take place. Clearly, anybody who is deaf and dumb cannot use the system; it cannot be used by those who are robbed of the power of speech or who are rendered unconscious. People who take seizures or attacks in the middle of the night are often unable to use the system.

There is a feeling among some relatives, backed up by a number of older people, that, once a person has proved to be unable to use the system—although they may be able to look after themselves in many other ways—they will inevitably move into residential care. The system will increase the number of people going into residential care, and will therefore increase their costs.

The people behind the petition want the Parliament to examine the system not just in the context of North Ayrshire, but how it is spreading across Scotland and the difficulties that the system creates. The present warden system does not provide 24-hour cover, but does so at the key difficult times, particularly overnight. There is adequate cover in the sheltered housing complex during the day, with domestic care staff and others present, and relatives are also around. It is at the

key time, overnight, when the withdrawal of the warden service will bring real damage.

I should stress that, despite Councillor O'Neill's letter, which alleges a media campaign against him and North Ayrshire Council, this issue is strongly supported by every old age pensioner group that I have spoken to, and not just in North Ayrshire. Those pensioners are not against anything—they are certainly not against the council—but they are in favour of the good continual care that they have at present, which they fear will be withdrawn from them. They are backed up by pensioners in other parts of Scotland who have experience of the system. They are asking this committee to look into this issue as a general Scottish issue, which will perhaps alert North Ayrshire Council about its plans to go ahead with the proposals by October, which would be detrimental to the interests of the people concerned.

The Convener: Thank you, Mike. That was brief. We are very limited in time today, but I will take a few comments and then draw members' attention to the paperwork that is before them.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I want to address the issue in a more general context, rather than considering the specific situation in North Ayrshire. This is not an isolated incident, nor does the petition relate only to councils. I was informed of a similar situation in a housing association in West Lothian, where wardens are being withdrawn. One factor is cost, and we should examine the relationship between cost and care. We want to encourage care in the community and supported accommodation. As the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, we must ensure that older members of our community feel safe and secure.

I am concerned about the health aspects of the situation, about which I wish to ask Mike Russell. One issue in relation to the situation in West Lothian that has been drawn to my attention is the fact that doctors are concerned about their patients who are in sheltered accommodation. The doctors would not feel comfortable about saying that their patients could continue to live in that sheltered accommodation, given the health risks. By the time that their patients receive attention, it could be at too short notice to get them into hospital to receive treatment. Some doctors are unhappy about their patients staying in sheltered accommodation without a permanent warden service. It is fair enough to say that housing providers are under difficult financial constraints, but it would be interesting to examine whether general care in the community is being compromised.

The Convener: Would that matter be more appropriately dealt with by the Health and

Community Care Committee, which is, I understand, conducting an inquiry into community care?

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): The Public Petitions Committee accepts that we should review the procedures for dealing with petitions in the Parliament. There is insufficient information in this petition for the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, or any other committee, to reach a decisive conclusion about it.

We have heard one side of the story from Mike Russell and the petitioners and we have received a letter from North Ayrshire Council, but we need to seek out other bits of information, to see whether the petition has genuine national implications for social inclusion. For example, the minister's views would be important, as would those of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. There are already operational examples across the country of that combination of sheltered accommodation wardens plus electronic cover being provided at weekends. Until we get that information, we cannot reach a conclusion.

You may wish to refer this petition back to the Public Petitions Committee, convener, because at our next meeting we will discuss how to seek comprehensive information before passing petitions on to other committees. We do not want to interfere in the policy areas that other committees have a right to consider, but we think that, in future, we should have a responsibility to ensure that as much information as possible is provided to committees before we ask them to act on petitions.

In this case, the petitioners' constituency member has not had a chance to speak to either the Public Petitions Committee or the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee. I do not know whether you wish to handle the petition, convener, or to send it back to the Public Petitions Committee, so that we could undertake—

The Convener: That is useful. If we refer the petition back to the Public Petitions Committee, would that committee pick up on the point about committees becoming involved in local decision making? It could be burdensome if that principle were to be agreed.

Mr McAllion: The Public Petitions Committee is keen to assert that committees should not get involved in local government decisions, because local councils are elected and are accountable for their decisions. We would only involve a committee of the Parliament in a petition if that petition has national implications.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): As I understand it, the petition is trying to draw our

attention to a national issue that requires a national perspective. I do not think that the petitioners are asking us to become too involved in the specifics of a local issue. From my experience, this is a burning issue, which is not just to do with community care. Many of the warden positions are not in community care; rather, they provide cover in sheltered housing. For example, in a sheltered housing accommodation unit in Kilmarnock, the deaths of two people went undiscovered for a week because the warden service was withdrawn six months ago. That would never have happened had the warden service still been in place.

As this is a fairly urgent issue across Scotland, the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee should not refer the petition back to the Public Petitions Committee, although I take John McAllion's point about the need for that committee to review its procedures. This particular problem has been drawn to the attention of this committee, and we would fail in our duty if we did not agree, as a committee, to consider the general policy issues thrown up by the petition and to come back with some recommendations.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I was pleased to hear John McAllion's comments, as I am growing a little concerned at the way in which we deal with some of the petitions that have been submitted. We are in danger of encroaching on the democratic rights and responsibilities of local government. Neither the Public Petitions Committee nor any of the other committees of the Parliament should be seen as an appeal court for local decisions with which people may not agree. From what John said, the Public Petitions Committee is addressing that point. I do not accept that we can make a decision about this petition on the scant information that is available to us today. The approach that has been recommended to us is the right one. We should note the petition.

09:45

I have experience of such systems as the Alert system, which is a good system. Those systems allow people who do not live in sheltered housing but who need that level of care to link into a system, so that they are able to receive care in their own homes, from their neighbours and others. Perhaps the Health and Community Care Committee should deal with this petition and consider whether the current levels of sheltered accommodation should be expanded. Many people who live in sheltered housing just want someone to pop in now and again, while there are others who need what is called very sheltered accommodation.

The level of cover that can be obtained from the system that North Ayrshire appears to be

proposing—about which I know nothing more than the information that is contained in the letter and the petition—seems to be used quite widely in the council area that I represent. Frankly, 24-hour cover has improved the service. Wardens do not work on a 24-hour basis, and while Mike Russell might ask what happens when someone falls ill and cannot press the button or pull the cord, that would still happen if a warden service were in place, as a resident would have to press a button to be able to call the warden. A service that allows residents to have 24-hour contact with people through a device that hangs around their neck or through pulling a cord is a better service.

The Convener: Three members have indicated that they wish to speak, and I will allow Mike Russell to come back in. Then I will try to bring this item to a conclusion, as we are overrunning already.

Michael Russell: A lot of the points that have been made can be answered in detail, but John McAllion is quite right that we cannot have a full debate on the issue raised in the petition, because none of us have that full detail.

Cathie Craigie referred to the community alarm system, which is a good system as it links in people who do not live in sheltered housing. For example, my mother, who lives in Galloway, uses that system. However, it is not necessarily the same as having a system of wardens within sheltered housing. People live in sheltered housing because they may, and often do, need an additional level of care, support and protection. Sheltered housing is often an intermediary stage, and there is different treatment of different people in different circumstances; however, I do not think that such systems are a substitute for a warden service.

Fiona Hyslop also made a good point, but the key issue is to ask, as John McAllion asked, "What happens now?" This petition could go back to the Public Petitions Committee as an example of how difficult it is for adequate information to be provided by community groups and others who have genuine concerns, which, as Alex Neil said, are also national concerns. For example, an issue may not be simply a local concern, as other correspondence may have been received that would let members know that it has national implications.

There is another way in which the petition could be dealt with. We could obtain additional information, consult the constituency member, who is Irene Oldfather, and who, I know, has had conversations with the campaigners, and consult organisations in East Ayrshire and West Lothian, where the issue has also been raised.

We could also take good examples such as

those from Cathie Craigie's constituency, which she mentioned, and come back with slightly more information by means of a rapporteur. That would not be too burdensome and the committee would be able to say either that there is something in the petition or that there is nothing in it. At least the committee would be able to say to the petitioners, "We have looked at this thoroughly".

The Convener: Clear proposals are being made on which I ask members to focus.

Mr Quinan: My main concern is about alarm and mobile systems, partly because I saw a report on "Channel 4 News" about an incident in Carlisle where the system failed and a resident of a sheltered housing complex suffered badly, having had a fit, fallen and broken her hip. The system failed because gasmen, who were working in the same street, used blocking equipment, which shut the system off. There are also examples of faults in systems elsewhere in the UK.

I do not know what system is being referred to here, but I think that we have to be careful about being dependent on technology that has failed in a number of areas. Investigation is required into whether the system that is being used is appropriate for the geography in which it is being used.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): As a well-known technophobe, I tend to take that view. However, we are not in possession of the full facts and are hearing only one side of the argument. There is also the danger that some petitions—John McAllion is better positioned to speak about this—encourage us to enter realms that do not have much to do with this. This is a question for the local authority and we can say no more than that.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I sympathise with the point that Bill Aitken has made. We are getting just one side of the story. This is not a new situation, as I remember that 15 or 20 years ago there was a problem with getting replacements for wardens—it is not always easy to fill the posts. People say that technology fails, but so do human beings. Recently, at Killin, in my constituency, I tried to call on the warden of a complex at a very reasonable time of day—in fact, I tried three times during the day to get into the complex—but one of the old people let me in and told that the warden was not there. We need a mixture of wardens and technology.

I have glanced through the letter from the leader of North Ayrshire Council. This is a local authority matter. It is a matter of national concern if it is happening nationally—I know that it has happened in other places. It is very important that we hear both sides of the story. That is why I am rather unhappy about this process. I do not say that Mike Russell does not hold his views strongly and

genuinely. However, in view of the letter from the leader of North Ayrshire Council, who says that the petition contains misleading information, if we were to take any action, we would have to hear the other side of the story.

The Convener: We have had a thorough discussion and are hearing clear views. Let us take a decision about this. One proposal is that we refer the matter back to the Public Petitions Committee. That is a clear proposal on which I intend to hold a vote; if that proposal is agreed to, we will not take any action. We will find out the result of that vote before we go through the other options that are available. We have the options of referring the matter to the Public Petitions Committee, appointing a reporter to pursue it, or just noting it—that seems to be an emerging view.

Cathie Craigie: The third option is the recommendation in the clerk's paper.

Mr McAllion: I suggest that we say that the decision by North Ayrshire Council is a matter for it, but that we are referring the matter back to the Public Petitions Committee to consider further whether there are any national implications arising from that decision. We can then consider what we do about it.

The Convener: In referring the matter back to the Public Petitions Committee, we would not be pursuing the inquiry for which the petition asks. We would ask that committee to consider the procedures.

Mr McAllion: The consideration of the Public Petitions Committee would involve contacting COSLA, the minister, constituency members and others.

Cathie Craigie: Surely that is a decision for the Public Petitions Committee to take. The recommendation is that we note the petition. It is up to the Public Petitions Committee to decide what it does about the petition.

The Convener: We will give attention to the recommendation in the paper, but other views are emerging.

Alex Neil: I disagree with John McAllion in that, on a housing and social inclusion issue, it is the role of this committee to decide whether it is a national issue, which should be addressed nationally. It is not the job of the Public Petitions Committee to decide whether the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee will address such an issue.

The Convener: That is one view. We have a clear proposal that we refer this matter back to the Public Petitions Committee because of the national ramifications.

Mr McAllion: There is an important argument. If the Public Petitions Committee simply refers to committees every petition relating to policy issues for which they are responsible, and does not carry out investigations, committees will become overburdened. This committee has a very heavy agenda. If it takes on the petition, when will it address it? We have a list of things to do, but the Public Petitions Committee has more time to carry out investigations and report back.

I do not want to take any policy decisions away from the committee, but asking the Public Petitions Committee to handle any investigation is one way of dealing with the matter. There has to be further investigation. I think it would be better if that were done by the Public Petitions Committee.

The Convener: We are short of time and I do not want to spend an inordinate amount of time on this. I propose that we vote on the recommendation that is in the paper. We can then vote on the proposal to ask the Public Petitions Committee to consider the national criteria. If those proposals fall, the third option is that we undertake an investigation. Members will have the chance to vote on those proposals.

Mr Quinan: It is not appropriate for the convener of the Public Petitions Committee to make a bid for something on which we should make a decision.

Mr McAllion: I am trying to help.

The Convener: John McAllion was trying to be helpful. If you do not agree with his proposal, vote against it.

Fiona Hyslop: There are two issues. First, on procedures, we should refer the petition back to the Public Petitions Committee so that in future we receive information from COSLA and others before we consider any petition. Secondly, as that has not happened in this case, I suggest that we recommend that there should be a national inquiry.

The Convener: You can vote on that proposal.

Michael Russell: I wish to raise an important point of order. What Lloyd Quinan says is valid. This would be the first time that any committee had referred a petition back to the Public Petitions Committee. I think that the procedure in standing orders is that petitions go to committees from the Public Petitions Committee. I am not sure whether standing orders would accept a referral back to the Public Petitions Committee. Rightly, the Public Petitions Committee may wish—I do not see any problem with this—to inquire into the validity of a petition, but I do not think that it can do so after it has passed a petition on to someone else. It has to do that when it receives a petition.

The Convener: You are getting ahead of

yourself. Can we vote first on the recommendation in the paper, that we say that it is inappropriate for the committee to become involved in the issue of the provision of particular local authority services? If you do not want the matter to go to the Public Petitions Committee, that is fine, but first we will vote on whether it is appropriate for the committee to deal with this. The recommendation is that we say that it is inappropriate for the committee to deal with the substance of the petition. I am now moving that proposal.

Alex Neil: On a point of order, convener. I do not agree with your interpretation. Two points arise here. The first is the question of whether the committee will become involved in the specifics of the North Ayrshire case—I do not think that anybody is arguing for that—but the second, more important, point is that the petitioners are drawing our attention to the matter as an issue of national policy importance. Although we do not want to become involved in the specifics of the North Ayrshire case, we reserve the right to deal with the national issue. Those are two separate issues.

The Convener: Whether we like it or not, people have submitted the petition that is in front of us to the Parliament and the Public Petitions Committee has asked us to consider it. We may interpret the petition in different ways, but we must deal with the substance of it. The substance of the petition is that the Scottish Parliament should seek an inquiry into North Ayrshire Council's decision. That is what we are voting on. I am moving the recommendation in the paper. That is a straightforward vote, Alex.

Alex Neil: No. I want to make a counter-proposal.

The Convener: Let me clarify. I will let you make a counter-proposal. We are voting on the recommendation in the paper on petition PE195, which has been prepared by the clerk. I am moving that we say that it is inappropriate for the committee to deal with this petition. If this vote falls, we can reconsider the matter.

Alex Neil: I am entitled to move an amendment.

The Convener: I am being advised that we have to move to a vote.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): With respect, I think that Alex Neil is right about this. It is not a question of whether a proposal be taken or rejected. It is a matter of a proposal to which an amendment can be put.

I think that I understand the gist of the argument. The essence of it is whether there is a national issue. I am not convinced that there is a national issue to the extent that a committee should be required to investigate it, but the view has emerged that the matter should be referred back

to the Public Petitions Committee for that committee to examine it further. Despite what Mike Russell suggested, I do not think that it would be incompetent for the committee to do that. That would be the appropriate amendment to the proposal.

The Convener: I am not suggesting that we cannot amend the proposal. However, we have to vote on the substance of the proposal that is in front of us.

Robert Brown: We have to vote first on the amendment.

Alex Neil: The petition makes two proposals. The petitioners are calling on us to do two separate things. First, we are being asked to seek an inquiry into North Ayrshire Council's decision to reduce full-time warden cover in sheltered housing. Secondly, we are being asked to review and assess the warden service on a national basis. I propose that we vote on those two issues separately.

The Convener: I am seeking clarification from the clerk on this, as I was not aware that we could break up petitions in that way. I will go along with it for the moment, as that seems to be the feeling of the committee.

Mr McAllion: May I provide clarification?

The Convener: Yes, as I am not sure that we can deal with the two issues raised in the petition separately.

Mr McAllion: I am suggesting that the petition go back to the Public Petitions Committee, not so that the Public Petitions Committee can dispose of it, but so that it can gather further information on behalf of this committee and refer the petition back at a later stage. This committee, rather than the Public Petitions Committee, would take the policy decision. More work needs to be done. I thought that it would be helpful if the Public Petitions Committee, rather than this committee, did it.

The Convener: We accept the spirit in which your suggestion is made, but we are now lost in the technicalities of whether we can break up a petition.

10:00

Mr Raffan: The simple way forward is to have two votes. If someone wants to propose an inquiry or to have a rapporteur examine this issue on a national basis, that is fine. However, clearly the petition as worded is flawed, so there should be two separate votes. I do not see how we can amend somebody else's petition.

The Convener: I will seek advice and come back to the committee. In my view, it is not for us to break up a petition. I will seek clarification on

the technicalities of that. In the spirit of this meeting, I will accept Alex Neil's proposal and we will have two separate votes. However, I am not sure whether we are allowed to do that.

We will now have two votes, one on the inquiry and one on the review of warden services on a national basis. Are members clear about what they are voting on?

Robert Brown: I am not clear what we are voting on. Is Alex Neil suggesting that there should be an inquiry now by this committee, or that we should refer the petition back to the Public Petitions Committee?

Alex Neil: I am suggesting that the petition asks us to address two policy issues. First, we are being asked to carry out a specific parliamentary inquiry into the situation in North Ayrshire. Secondly, we are being asked to assess warden services as a national policy issue. Although most members do not seem to favour a specific inquiry, they may favour examining warden services as a national policy issue. Rather than throw the petition out in a huff, we should take the opportunity to consider both questions.

The Convener: We will vote, first, on whether to conduct an inquiry into the North Ayrshire decision. Secondly, we will vote on whether we wish to investigate the national picture. If we agree to do that in principle, we can then consider how we do it. However, I am still not happy with this procedure.

Robert Brown: With respect, I do not think that that is right. Members seem to be agreed that we should not investigate the situation in North Ayrshire.

Members: No.

The Convener: A vote has been called for and the issue must go to a vote.

Robert Brown: The issue is whether there is anything else to look into.

The Convener: We will vote on that.

Robert Brown: There are two ways of looking into this issue. First, this committee can do it. Secondly, the petition can be referred back to the Public Petitions Committee.

The Convener: Let us make a decision on the principle first.

Robert Brown: We do not have enough information to make that decision yet.

The Convener: There is a proposal and we must vote on it, whether we like it or not.

Robert Brown: I am suggesting that Alex Neil's proposal be amended and that we refer the petition back to the Public Petitions Committee for

further information.

The Convener: I rule that we vote as Alex Neil proposed. Once we have done that, we may take another vote on what we do with the petition. Voting on Alex Neil's suggestion does not exclude any other proposals. If Robert Brown wishes to make a further proposal—

Robert Brown: I do not think that that is right, convener.

The Convener: That is the advice that I am being given by the clerk, and I intend to follow it.

The first question is, do we wish to conduct an inquiry into North Ayrshire Council's decision to reduce full-time warden cover in sheltered housing?

Members indicated disagreement.

The Convener: The amendment to that proposal is:

That the committee review and assess the warden service on a national basis.

Mr McAllion: Does that mean this committee?

The Convener: The petition is for this committee. A vote in favour would commit this committee to carry out that work. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Convener: There will be a division.

FOR

Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Quinan, Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

The Convener: The result of the division is: For 3, Against 7, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Convener: This is new territory for us all, but in my view the petition has fallen, as the committee has voted against its two components.

Robert Brown: I do not agree. We have still to decide whether we should refer the petition back to the Public Petitions Committee. I am prepared to propose that.

Mr Quinan: I have a counter-proposal.

The Convener: We will hear Robert Brown's proposal first.

Robert Brown: I suggest, on the basis of Mr

McAllion's earlier advice, that we refer the petition back to the Public Petitions Committee for further information.

The Convener: We can take that as a proposal:

That PE195 by Cathleen Hanlon on behalf of Irvine Pensioners Action Group be referred back to the Public Petitions Committee for that committee to provide further information.

Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Convener: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)

The Convener: The result of the division is: For 9, Against 0, Abstentions 1.

Proposal agreed to.

The Convener: Are there any other proposals?

Mr Quinan: My proposal would fall in the light of what has just happened. Does the convener always vote, or only in the case of a tie?

Lee Bridges (Clerk Team Leader): The convener has a vote, as well as the casting vote on top of that, if required.

The Convener: The petition will be referred to the Public Petitions Committee.

Michael Russell: Thank you, convener. I am sorry for causing you so much trouble. I will let the petitioners have a copy of the *Official Report* for this meeting.

10:06

Meeting continued in private until 13:23.

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

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Tuesday 27 June 2000

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