

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 18 February 2003
(*Morning*)

Session 1

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 18 February 2003

	Col.
ITEMS IN PRIVATE	3413
SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION	3414
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2003 (draft)	3414
Housing Revenue Account General Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 2003 (SSI 2003/54)	3415
LEGACY PAPER	3416

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

3rd Meeting 2003, Session 1

CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

*Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Des McNulty (Deputy Minister for Social Justice)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jim Johnston

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Gerald McInally

ASSISTANT CLERK

Craig Harper

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Social Justice Committee

Tuesday 18 February 2003

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 10:04]

Items in Private

The Convener (Johann Lamont): I welcome everyone to the third meeting of the Social Justice Committee in 2003. I ask members to agree that items 5 and 6 be taken in private. Item 5 is consideration of the draft report on the mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation and item 6 is consideration of the draft committee annual report. Are we agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I should also mention that we have apologies from Kenneth Gibson and that Linda Fabiani has indicated that she may be a little late.

Subordinate Legislation

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of Scottish statutory instruments. I welcome Des McNulty, the Deputy Minister for Social Justice, and John Ritchie, the official who is accompanying the minister for consideration of the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2003.

Before we begin, it might be worth while to outline briefly the procedure for dealing with the two statutory instruments that are before us, although I am sure that the committee knows it all off by heart anyway. The first SSI is an affirmative instrument, so the deputy minister is required under rule 10.6.2 of the standing orders to propose by motion that the draft instrument be approved.

The second instrument is a negative instrument, and so is subject to annulment under rule 10.4 of the standing orders. Any member who is unhappy with such an order is required to lodge a motion proposing that nothing further be done under the instrument. No motions to annul have been lodged.

Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2003 (draft)

The Convener: Committee members have received copies of the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2003 and the accompanying documentation. I invite the minister to speak briefly to the SSI, but he should not move the motion yet.

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Des McNulty): I will be brief. The order sets out the amount of housing support grant that will be payable to local authorities in 2003-04.

As has been the case for a number of years, only the two councils with the highest debt per house, Shetland Islands Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar—no doubt the committee will keep me right on the pronunciation of that—will qualify for grant in respect of their housing costs. The total grant payable to those two councils in 2003-04 will be around £5.6 million. HSG remains a substantial proportion of the total housing revenue account income for those two councils. Without the subsidy, rent levels in those areas would have to increase substantially.

The other element of HSG is the hostels grant, which is payable to authorities on the basis of the estimated deficit between hostels' income and expenditure. In 2003-04, 21 councils will receive grant totalling some £4 million.

I am happy to answer any questions.

The Convener: As there are no questions, I ask the minister to move motion S1M-3907.

Motion moved,

That the Social Justice Committee, in consideration of the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2003, recommends that the Order be approved.—[Des McNulty.]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: I thank the minister for attending. It was painless.

Des McNulty: I hope that all the items are as short and sweet as that one.

Housing Revenue Account General Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 2003 (SSI 2003/54)

The Convener: The committee has before it a copy of the Housing Revenue Account General Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 2003 (SSI 2003/54) and the accompanying documentation. If no member has any comments on the order, is the committee content with it?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Therefore, the committee will not make any recommendation on the order in its report to the Parliament.

I ask members to agree that we report to the Parliament on our decisions on the two orders. Are we agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Legacy Paper

The Convener: Item 4 is consideration of our legacy paper. We have a draft of it before us. I invite general comments from members, after which we will go through the paper paragraph by paragraph.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The paper is very good and, to my mind, summarises the issues excellently.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I have a small amendment.

The Convener: We will go through the paper paragraph by paragraph, just in case there is anything that members wish to add.

On the introduction, are there any comments on paragraphs 1 or 2?

Are there any comments on paragraph 3, on the background?

Are there comments on paragraph 4, which is on activity in the first session?

Are there any comments on paragraphs 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 or 18, on committee inquiries?

On scrutiny of primary legislation, are there any comments on paragraphs 19 or 20? When you see the list in paragraph 19, it looks like quite a lot.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Should not the Abolition of Poindings and Warrant Sales Bill be included in paragraph 19, because we scrutinised that?

The Convener: Yes, we played quite a significant role in the final decisions.

Are there any comments on paragraphs 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 or 26?

Do members have any comments on paragraph 27, on the scrutiny of subordinate legislation?

On post-enactment scrutiny, are there any comments on paragraphs 28, 29, 30 or 31?

Are there any comments on paragraphs 32, 33 or 34, which address the scrutiny of the budget process?

Are there any comments on paragraphs 35 or 36, on the response to Executive consultations, on paragraph 37, on the consideration of petitions, or on paragraph 38, on the civic participation event?

Are there any comments on other methods of working, which are dealt with in paragraphs 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 and 49?

Do members have any comments on the conclusion, on paragraphs 50, 51 or 52?

Karen Whitefield: Yes, I have a comment on paragraph 52. Our clerks were far too modest when they compiled the legacy paper. They thanked the organisations that we have worked with and the social justice ministers, which is right, but the paper also needs to reflect our thanks to the clerks who have worked with the committee, because they have supported us very well over the past four years.

The Convener: If that part is not fulsome enough, I have powers to make it more fulsome.

One point that I should have mentioned is that we have received correspondence from the European Committee. Perhaps we should add something about European issues in relation to social justice, social justice plans and so on under outstanding or on-going issues. If that is agreeable, we will add that to the report.

Robert Brown: The other issue of a general nature is that in the early stages we had difficulty in pinning down how much we could fit into the session. Of course, with legislation coming and going, that has been awkward. It would not be unhelpful to give a nod towards the need to be able to programme work in a measured way, so that we can do sensible things effectively, without biting off more than we can chew.

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): Do you mean timetabling?

Robert Brown: Yes. We have made that point a number of times.

The Convener: Yes—doing a bit really well, rather than feeling that we have just touched base on a lot of different things.

Robert Brown: Yes. The Social Justice Committee cannot solve the world's problems within a four-year parliamentary session, but we can make significant contributions within discrete areas.

The Convener: Do we agree the legacy paper?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We have completed our planned work programme, so unless there is unforeseen business that we have to deal with, this will probably be the last meeting of the Social Justice Committee, which is quite a significant stage for us all. I want to put on record my thanks to all the clerks we have worked with, but in particular to the current team, as we have got to this stage with the legacy paper in good order. I also thank all the committee members who—at least during the time that I have been convener—have contributed very much to a positive working atmosphere.

My view is that it is possible for committees to work consensually if we are honest about where

we agree, and deal with the fact that there are bits about which we do not agree, and do not try to force a consensus where one does not exist. Across parties, work on the committee has been a good and positive experience. I close the public session.

Robert Brown: Before you do that, on behalf of the rest of us, I thank you, without wishing to appear too—

Mrs McIntosh: Sycophantic?

Robert Brown: That is right. The committee has been a good one to work on, under you and under Margaret Curran. I think that I speak for all of us when I say that we have enjoyed the work of the Social Justice Committee, which has been important and relevant. That has been greatly helped by the attitudes of and the approaches taken by the two conveners.

The Convener: Thank you.

10:15

Meeting continued in private until 10:20.

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