

STANDARDS AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Thursday 8 September 2005

Session 2

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STANDARDS AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

8th Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
*Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)
*Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
*Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)
*Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab)
*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)
Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Andrew Mylne

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Sarah Robertson

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Standards and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 8 September 2005

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:30*]

The Convener (Brian Adam): I welcome members to the 8th meeting in 2005 of the Standards and Public Appointments Committee and remind you that it might be best to switch off your mobile phones. In particular, I welcome Christine May to what is her first meeting as a member of the committee. No apologies are necessary as we are all here, although I understand that Mr Gorrie may leave a little early because he wishes to attend the Public Petitions Committee for an item on its agenda later this morning.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Me, too.

The Convener: If we press on with the agenda, you might not have to miss out—you never know.

Interests

10:30

The Convener: Under agenda item 1, I invite Christine May to declare any interests that are relevant to the committee's work.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Thank you for your welcome, convener. I am pleased to be joining the committee. I draw members' attention to my interests, which are listed in my entry in the register of interests. I am an unremunerated board member of Community Enterprise in Strathclyde, which is an organisation that helps to develop social businesses. I am convener of the Scottish Library and Information Council—which, again, is unremunerated—a trustee of the Fife Historic Buildings Trust and a member of the management group of the Financial Services Skills Council. As well as being a member of the Co-operative Party and of the Transport and General Workers Union, I am—for my sins—a member of the East Fife Football Club Supporters Trust.

Items in Private

10:31

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, we must decide whether to take in private consideration of items 6 and 7. In relation to item 7, we have no choice—it is a statutory requirement that we consider it in private. I suggest that we take item 6 in private, too, so that we can agree our press release. There seems little point in doing that in public and then issuing the press release. Do members agree to take in private consideration of items 6 and 7?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-party Group

10:32

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is consideration of an application for a cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on a culture of peace in Scotland. The application was submitted by Chris Ballance, who I am delighted to welcome to the meeting. I think that Chris was present, if not at our last meeting, then at the one before that for a similar reason. Do you have any remarks to add to the detailed application that is before us?

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I should start by giving an on-the-record absolute promise that I will not attempt to start any more cross-party groups during this session of Parliament—assuming that today's application is successful. There are 58 cross-party groups and I am aware that a monitoring mechanism might be needed to ensure that all cross-party groups operate in accordance with standing orders and have properly attended meetings. That argument is completely separate—it is not a case for rejecting the establishment of a new cross-party group that is properly constituted and, I hope, in good order.

The objective of the group incorporates the phrase “creating a culture of peace”, which is one of the central themes—if not the central theme—of the United Nations over this decade. That phrase has been chosen deliberately to coincide with a key theme of the United Nations.

The proposal stems from my members' business debate on peace education, which took place about 18 months ago. The subject of that debate attracted more than 100 messages to the Parliament's bulletin board, which meant that it was among the topics that attracted most public interest in the bulletin board's lifetime. Messages of support were received from a range of Scottish people, including the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and from further afield—for example, from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We also obtained the Executive's support for such programmes of activity. During the debate in question, the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People said:

“We will certainly encourage projects such as that throughout Scotland.”—[*Official Report*, 24 June 2004; c 9643.]

The proposal has wide support. I point out that the group would not be a pacifist group, but would promote peaceful ways of working, whenever that is possible. No other cross-party group operates in the same area. What could be more important than supporting and raising the profile of people and organisations in Scotland that work towards

creating a culture of peace in schools and civic society?

The Convener: Our role is to ensure that cross-party groups comply with the current regulations. It appears that no members have any questions.

I am grateful for Chris Ballance's commitment that he will not attempt to start any more cross-party groups this session. I remind the committee that we have agreed that we will consider how we can manage the number of CPGs. As far as I can see, Chris Ballance's proposal complies with the regulations. Are members content that we accept the application?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I thank Chris Ballance for his time; I will write to him in due course.

Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland

10:36

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is consideration of a draft report on the committee's response to the consultation paper from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland. Members have had some time to examine the report and to comment on it. I am happy to take further comments on that. If we agree to the report today it will go before Parliament on 21 September for a 45-minute debate. There is a minor technical amendment to the material that is published. It had been agreed that candidates' educational backgrounds would be anonymised, but that was not spelled out in the papers that the committee received. Does anyone have any questions or comments?

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): The draft report is fine, and we should proceed with it, with the inclusion of the amendment that you mentioned.

The Convener: Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Conference

10:38

The Convener: I have received an invitation to make a presentation on codes of conduct to a conference in Belgrade. The conference has been organised by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe for selected committees of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. Members have some of the background papers. This invitation follows on from the one that the committee received from Bosnia, where I did a similar exercise. Are members content that I do it again?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): The fact that you received the invite suggests that you did quite a good job in Bosnia. I have no problems with your accepting the invite and representing the committee.

The Convener: I learned a significant lesson: do not try to tell jokes in English to people who do not understand it. I tried to make some jokes at my expense, on my well-known hatred of onions, and they went down like a lead balloon. I was advised in advance that Bosnians like onions so perhaps that is why. I referred to the previous profession of our standards commissioner, and the need to have that kind of professional involvement with members of a Parliament, but that also went down like a lead balloon. Incidentally, Dr Dyer was a psychiatrist.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): Given that, convener, why have you received another invitation? It seems extraordinary.

The Convener: The rest of my visit went quite well.

Bill Butler: I think that you should go, but without the jokes.

The Convener: I have learned that lesson.

Christine May: I agree that you should go but I note that the invitation is also for an official. I assume that the committee agrees—if we are being asked to agree—that that should happen. It is important that we have contacts at official and civil service level because not only do we hope that they will learn from us but equally we hope that we will learn something from them.

The Convener: On the previous occasion I was not the only parliamentarian there. In fact, there was a gentleman from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which had been going through the same kind of exercise and it was interesting to hear what it was doing. The

committee clerk at the time engaged with various organisations that were there. The OSCE is doing a good job trying to share experiences from different Parliaments in order to build democracy in the Balkans. I went in fear and trepidation last time; I hope that I will not have to do that this time.

I appreciate the support of the committee. Yes; the intention is that I take a member of the clerking team with me. We will leave it to the clerking team to decide who that will be.

10:42

Meeting continued in private until 11:29.

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