

# **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 30 June 1999  
*(Morning)*

Meeting 2

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**CONVENER :**

\*Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS :**

Ms Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

\*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

\*Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)

\*Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

\*attended

**COMMITTEE CLERK:**

Vanessa Glynn

**ASSISTANT CLERK:**

Alastair Goudie



# Scottish Parliament

## Standards Committee

*Wednesday 30 June 1999*

*(Morning)*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:48*]

**The Convener (Mr Mike Rumbles):** Welcome to the formal session of the second meeting of the Standards Committee. We have a short agenda: to consider the initial work programme. All members have had the benefit of the briefing papers that we received last week and the oral briefings that we had in our private meeting this morning.

Before we get into the first and only item on the agenda, I should let everybody know that the Parliamentary Bureau has instructed me to make a statement and propose a motion on the "Register of Members' Interests", to be taken without debate on Friday. I will read my statement and motion to members so that everyone is aware of what we are doing.

"The Scotland Act 1998 (Transitory and Transitional Provisions) (Members' Interests) Order 1999, requires the Parliament to determine when and how the Register of Members' Interests should be printed and published. Statements for the Register are now due to be entered in the Register.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Register be made available, on or after today's date, in a loose-leaf folder in the office of the Clerk of the Parliament and on the Internet."

## Work Programme

**The Convener:** All members have the draft work programme that the clerks produced. It says:

"It is proposed that the committee will meet (after the recess) fortnightly until the committee decides otherwise, with the first meeting to be held in the week beginning 30 August."

Is everybody happy with that?

**Members:** Yes.

**The Convener:** The document also says:

"It is the committee's intention that its practice will be to meet in public, except where the circumstances demand privacy. Further consideration, in the light of decisions on the role of the committee, will be given to the circumstances in which the committee would meet in private."

In other words, the assumption is that we will meet in public but we will occasionally meet in private. In our last meeting, the opinion was

expressed that we should be consistent in our decisions about when to meet in private. We can discuss the details after the recess.

In the section on the "Register of Members' Interests", the document proposes that, in our first meeting after the recess, we

"consider the manner and timing of the publication in documentary form by the Clerk of the Register of Members' Interests."

The main business of that meeting will be a discussion of a code of conduct for members and a guide to the rules that relate to that code. During the summer break, the clerks will produce a draft code and guide for us to examine. Is everybody happy with that?

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):**

I am happy for the clerks to proceed. I was impressed by the consultative steering group's document and I think that it is important that we have a positive code of guidance. We have a duty to tell members what they should do, rather than what they should not do. We have to send a message to the people of Scotland that the Parliament will be open, transparent and accountable. We need to let them know who we are and tell them that we are decent and honest and that we want to engage with them. I would prefer that the code of conduct is a positive statement of our aspirations as well as our expectations.

**The Convener:** That is a good point and well put. The clerks confirm that we have taken that on board. The code will be positive, not just a case of "Thou shalt not".

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** It would be useful to get copies of the Neill recommendations or the consultation paper as they will play a big part in the way in which we move on. It might be useful for this committee to contribute to the Neill committee's consultation process. After the recess we can decide whether we want to make a representation and what form such a representation would take.

**The Convener:** It is important to remember that there is a tremendous amount of detailed work to be done on the code of conduct and the guide in August and September. Because Parliament wants to debate those issues as soon as possible, we are under pressure to get through our work as quickly as we can. It is important that the clerks take the guidance that we are giving them and produce draft documents for discussion after the recess.

**Karen Gillon:** That is important, but we should tell the Parliamentary Bureau that we do not want to rush at our work and get it wrong; it is important that we get it right. We need to work within constraints but also be aware that the code and

the guide will last for a long time and that, if we get them right, we will not have the problems that bodies such as Westminster and local government have had. We should get it right first time rather than rush it through for the sake of parliamentary time. A balance needs to be struck. Perhaps you and the clerks could speak to the bureau about that.

**The Convener:** We could start out with a transitional code, which we could take time to revise. The bureau wants to move quickly, in parliamentary terms.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** I support what Tricia said earlier about stressing the importance of good practices. The seven principles in the Nolan committee's report on local government—selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership—are almost a mission statement. I think we are looking for a similar sort of thing. Stressing the importance of good practices at the outset would help to give a good overall impression.

**Tricia Marwick:** I would like to pick up on what Karen said about the balance that needs to be struck between getting the code right and getting something done. I suggest that we should agree quickly on the key principles that will underpin everything else. We could publish those principles for the Parliament and the more detailed guidance could await further consideration.

**The Convener:** The worry is that members would be left without practical guidance. However, we will address the principles in the first meeting.

Draft documents will be produced over the summer. Is everybody happy that they have had their say?

**Members:** Yes.

**The Convener:** Thank you all for coming. We will meet again after the recess.

*Meeting closed at 10:57.*

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