

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 28 October 2008

Session 3

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

18th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Gillian Baxendine

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERKS

Mary Dinsdale

Jane Williams

ASSISTANT CLERK

Catherine Fergusson

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Tuesday 28 October 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:15*]

Interests

The Convener (Keith Brown): I welcome everyone to the 18th meeting this year of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, and I remind members and the public to switch off their mobile phones and BlackBerrys. We have received apologies from Jamie McGrigor.

I thank Cathie Craigie and Marlyn Glen for their contributions to the committee's work and I welcome Marilyn Livingstone and Peter Peacock to the committee. I hope that they enjoy their experience. I invite them to declare relevant interests.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I do not think that there is anything specific to draw to the committee's attention, apart from what is in my entry in the register of members' interests.

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, do not think that there is anything to draw to the committee's attention, other than what is in the register of interests. This is not strictly necessary, but given item 5, I should perhaps say that I am deputy convener of the Scottish Parliamentary Pension Scheme Committee, which considered the proposals on pensions to which the Parliament has given its initial approval.

The Convener: Thank you.

Deputy Convener

14:16

The Convener: Members have a note from the clerk, which sets out the procedure for selecting a deputy convener. The Parliament agreed that members of the Labour Party are eligible to be chosen as deputy convener of this committee. I invite nominations for the position.

Peter Peacock: I nominate Marilyn Livingstone.

The Convener: No seconder is needed.

Marilyn Livingstone was chosen as deputy convener.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

14:16

The Convener: I seek the committee's approval to take in private item 6, which is consideration of draft guidance. It is proposed that the committee consider the guidance in private before reaching a final view. The committee previously agreed that items 7 and 8, which are consideration of draft reports, should be taken in private, given that the draft reports might not reflect the committee's final view. Do members agree to take item 6 in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-party Groups

14:17

The Convener: The committee's agreement to the establishment of two cross-party groups is sought. Neither group has previously been active. Members are aware that in considering whether to approve a proposed CPG we must take account of a range of matters, such as the group's purpose and whether it is being formed on the basis of public interest.

First, we will consider the proposed CPG on co-operatives. No member of the group is present, but officials asked a couple of questions and received a response from Willie Coffey's assistant, which addressed their queries.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I should say that I am a member of the group.

Marilyn Livingstone: I put my name down for the group, too.

The Convener: Okay. The registration form lists some non-MSPs from organisations that are listed as organisational members. Under the code of conduct for MSPs, an organisation can have only one vote, although it can be represented by different individuals at CPG meetings. Likewise, each non-MSP individual member has one vote. Mr Coffey's assistant said:

"The affiliations of the individuals are given for the purposes of transparency only; there is no suggestion that any organisation will have more than one representative to the CPG ... Organisations will be represented at meetings by a named individual. Anyone who is an individual member of the group but is representing an organisation at a group meeting will participate in the meeting in that capacity only and will not have two votes."

The response clears up the issue and makes clear the basis on which people can come to meetings and be entitled to vote. However, if we agree to the group's establishment, we must make it clear that registration is on the basis that members should join either as representatives of an organisation or in an individual capacity.

Our officials also asked how much money or equivalent support the group would receive. Mr Coffey's assistant replied:

"If approved, the CPG will establish a programme of meetings and activities. When that is done, and the input required from the Secretary is clear, the value of that input will be calculated, and, if greater than £250, will be declared."

The group is certainly aware of the rules, although the rules might change shortly, depending on what decision is made, and the threshold for declaring benefits might be increased to £500. I suggest that if we agree to the group's registration we make it

clear in our letter that we do so on the basis of the rules. Are members content to recognise the group?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The second proposed cross-party group is on coronary heart disease and stroke. None of the proposed office bearers is able to attend this meeting. If members have questions about the group, I will write to its proposed convener, Roseanna Cunningham, to seek clarification.

Dave Thompson: I am a member of the group and I will be happy to try to answer the committee's questions.

The Convener: No questions were raised by our officials.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I have no objection to the group's establishment, but I am conscious of the sheer number of cross-party groups that are formed, particularly to consider illnesses of various kinds. The appropriate staffing of cross-party groups is a major issue in a Parliament of 129 members—perhaps 100 members take part in such groups, if we eliminate ministers and members who do not take part. I am a member of one or two groups and have been a member of many others, and I think that members will find that it is possible to do a proper job on only two or three groups. Is attention given to the number of cross-party groups?

The Convener: There are restrictions only in relation to how groups are established; there is no limit on the number of groups, although there is the practical issue of servicing groups with enough MSPs, as you said. For my part, I have restricted my involvement to two groups, I think. I do not think that there has been a proposal to restrict the number of groups.

Robert Brown: It would not be practical to do that and I am not saying that we should do so. However, there is an issue. There has been a cross-party group on almost every ailment known to man or woman. I accept that the proposed group that we are talking about is on an important matter.

The Convener: You will know this better than I do, but whether a group is set up often reflects the vehemence of the interest group for the particular niche.

Robert Brown: Yes, absolutely.

The Convener: Are members happy to approve the establishment of the cross-party group on coronary heart disease and stroke?

Members indicated agreement.

Work Programme

14:22

The Convener: Item 5 relates to the committee's work programme and consideration of rule changes to implement aspects of the Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Bill when it has completed its passage through the Parliament. Alasdair Morgan, the convener of the Scottish Parliamentary Pension Scheme Committee, has written to us to outline areas in which rule changes might be required. It is anticipated that if the bill is passed, the act will receive royal assent at the end of February 2009, and that at least some rule changes will be required shortly afterwards. Do members want to comment or ask for clarification, perhaps from Peter Peacock, who has been involved with the bill? To be honest, I found Mr Morgan's letter quite hard to follow.

Are members happy to agree that the proposed rule changes be given priority in the committee's future work programme and that officials should give preliminary consideration to the proposed rule changes?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I ask members of the public and others to leave. We are about to go into private session.

14:23

Meeting continued in private until 15:22.

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