

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 30 June 2004
(*Morning*)

Session 2

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

18th Meeting 2004, Session 2

CONVENER

*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)

*Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab)

*Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP)

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Roberts

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

The Chamber

Scottish Parliament

Education Committee

Wednesday 30 June 2004

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:48*]

Item in Private

The Convener (Robert Brown): Good morning. I welcome everybody to this meeting of the Education Committee. We are in public session; therefore I ask everyone—including myself—to ensure that all mobile telephones and pagers are turned off.

Item 1 is to decide whether to take item 4 in private. We have agreed to take such items in private previously. Is the committee agreed to take the item in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill

09:49

The Convener: Item 2 is the proposed Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill. The committee is invited to consider how we will tackle the work that we will have to do when the bill comes before us. It has not been formally introduced, but we are going to get it in the not-too-distant future. Members have a paper containing the clerk's suggestions, some of which result from the discussions that we have had about how we might approach the bill. It is suggested that we get about the country a bit and take some oral evidence at formal committee meetings on Skye and in Glasgow, as well as in Edinburgh. There has also been some discussion about the potential for a public meeting and associated events in Perth at the time of the Royal National Mod in October. Do members have any observations on that?

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): There could be different points of view in different parts of the country. Glasgow and Skye have a Gaelic language education tradition. I wonder whether we should consider taking evidence from places such as the Borders, which might have a somewhat different perspective.

The Convener: That is right. We will advertise for evidence in the usual way. Should we hold meetings in those areas rather than hear evidence just from the councils in certain agreed areas? I do not have a fixed view on that. I wonder what the committee feels about that.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): It is necessary for us to go to the Gaelic college on Skye. If we did not, that would be regarded as an omission.

The Convener: It is intended that we will meet at the Gaelic college.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Ken Macintosh's father played a distinguished role in the Gaelic college, and it would be appropriate for us to meet there. I do not dissent from what Elaine Murray said—it depends on time and the availability of members.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Why are we going to have a meeting in Edinburgh?

The Convener: I do not think that there will be one specific meeting in Edinburgh; we will just have our normal committee meetings in Edinburgh. The suggestion for a meeting on Skye is fairly obvious, as is the proposal for a meeting in Glasgow because of the Gaelic communities there: the Gaelic primary school, the Gaelic secondary school unit and the significant Gaelic-speaking population in the west of Scotland.

Rhona Brankin: What about Shetland? The people there would have interesting views.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If we went to Shetland, we would get into other language problems. Perhaps that would be biting off a little more than we could chew at this stage.

The Convener: Do members have any other views on Elaine Murray's point about taking evidence in the Borders? Should we take evidence or make a visit?

Dr Murray: It may not be necessary for us to visit the Borders, but I want to ensure that the points of view of the south of the country are also borne in mind, considering what might be expected of councils there, but may not be considered necessary.

The Convener: In a sense, the Borders, Orkney and Shetland are fairly obvious areas to consult. Perhaps we should consult some of the areas where there is a minor Gaelic interest, although not one that is dominant or of the same level that exists in Glasgow or Edinburgh. Perhaps we should take evidence from councils in areas such as St Andrews.

Dr Murray: On a slightly different point, if we hold a meeting on Skye it will take members a little time to get there and back, and some of us are members of other committees. I wondered what timing had been considered for that meeting. Is it suggested that it should be held on a Monday?

The Convener: I think that it probably is.

Martin Verity (Clerk): The suggestion is that the committee will travel out there on the Sunday to hold a meeting on the Monday. Some or all members may then wish to stay over on the Monday night to enable more time for committee business on that day; however, that would not necessarily involve the whole committee. There will certainly be an overnight stay on the Sunday night.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Our quorum is three members. It would be understood that not all members would necessarily be expected to attend.

Dr Murray: Some of us would like to attend if we could, though.

The Convener: That is right, although I hope that there will be a good turnout from the committee. It is important that we show ourselves at such events when we travel around the country, as we do not do that very often.

Rhona Brankin: It would be a formal committee meeting.

The Convener: Yes. I accept the fact that it does not always suit members to travel so far, but

I think that we should make an effort to have as good a turnout as we can. We have nine members; therefore, there is the potential for a decent showing.

Rhona Brankin: I do not know whether it is necessary for us to go anywhere other than Skye and Glasgow. I presume that we do not have to make a final decision today.

The Convener: No. We can probably deal with any other matters through evidence from appropriate people—council officials or whoever—in Edinburgh in the normal way. Does the committee agree the clerk's paper? That will allow the clerks to forward the request for appropriate approvals for committee meetings outwith Edinburgh to the Conveners Group and the Parliamentary Bureau.

Members indicated agreement.

Away Day Seminar

09:55

The Convener: Item 3 is consideration of the committee's proposed away day, which is scheduled for Thursday 2 September. I have heard that that is also the date of the Labour group's away day. Is that correct?

Rhona Brankin: Yes, it is.

The Convener: Given the number of Labour members on the Education Committee, it might be worth revising the date for our away day.

Rhona Brankin: We have tried to persuade the Labour group to shift the date for its away day, but it will not. I am sorry.

Dr Murray: We have done our best.

The Convener: We always have this difficulty, to a degree. Unless there is strong opposition to the proposal, we should perhaps try to move the committee's away day. The date was only tentative, anyway.

Martin Verity: The committee has agreed in principle to hold an away day; we are not looking for a further decision on that. We can seek alternative dates without too much difficulty. The other purpose of the paper that members have is to see whether the committee is broadly content with the proposed elements of the away day.

The Convener: The paper gives us a steer about where we are going, what our timescales allow us to do, and so forth. It allows us to get a bit of forward line on some of the issues. If there are no suggestions for issues that members would like included or excluded, is the committee happy with the paper?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thanks very much. The committee agrees the broad structure of the away day. All being well, Scottish Executive staff will attend for the briefing on the curriculum review.

We now move into private session—not that it makes much difference, given the assembled multitudes today—for discussion of the child protection inquiry draft report.

09:57

Meeting continued in private until 10:38.

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