

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday 8 September 2005

Session 2

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

14th Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)

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

*Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)

*Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

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

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Dr Mike Gibson (Scottish Executive Education Department)

Stewart Robertson (Scottish Executive Education Department)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Roberts

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

Education Committee

Thursday 8 September 2005

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:01*]

Interests

The Deputy Convener (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I call members to order and open the 14th meeting in 2005 of the Education Committee. According to the standing orders I have to take the chair, albeit with extreme brevity. For a terrible moment I thought that it might be the oldest member of the committee who had to take the chair, but happily that is not the case. While some politicians have a future, others have a past.

Virtually all of us who are present have made a declaration of interests in the past, so unless they have something to add colleagues need not do so again. However, I welcome Iain Smith as the new member of the committee and invite him to declare any relevant interests.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Thank you, deputy convener. I have no relevant interests to declare.

Convener

14:03

The Deputy Convener: The second agenda item is the election of a convener. The Parliament has agreed that a member of the Liberal Democrats is eligible for nomination as convener of the committee. I am glad to propose Iain Smith and I invite the committee to support my nomination by general acclamation.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Iain Smith was chosen as convener.

The Deputy Convener: I warmly congratulate Iain Smith on his appointment and invite him to relieve me of the arduous duties of chairmanship. I wish him every possible success.

The Convener (Iain Smith): I thank Lord James and members of the committee for electing me as convener of the Education Committee. It is a great privilege to be the convener of such an important committee in the Parliament. I know that members had little choice with regard to whom they chose, but I thank them for their support. The colleague whom I replace, Robert Brown, tells me that the committee is well behaved and hard working and I look forward to working with you. It will be hard work and I hope that we can work well together as a team to get through the business before the Education Committee in the coming months.

Additional Support for Learning (Code of Practice)

14:04

The Convener: Item 3 is the additional support for learning code of practice. Members will have received a note as a result of the evidence that the committee took from the former Deputy Minister for Education and Young People on the draft additional support for learning code of practice on 25 May 2005, and a copy of the draft code. The Scottish Executive launched its final code of practice on 25 August.

We have before us a letter from the current Deputy Minister for Education and Young People to the committee's deputy convener, which outlines ministers' response to the points that the committee raised in its report. Do members have any issues that they wish to raise?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I thank the minister for the adjustments that have been made to the code, which have been most helpful.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): It is quite marked how the minister and the Executive have responded. Most of the points that we raised have been addressed in the code, and that is an example of the Executive making use of a committee's advice and making changes that might not necessarily have been made under previous practices. That is a good sign.

The only point of concern that I suspect we might come back to is paragraph 26, on personal learning plans and individualised educational programmes and how they would be implemented under the draft code. I am quite satisfied with all the other points, but that is still an area of concern. I understand the Executive's point about not duplicating guidance on IEPs and PLPs in an already substantial code, but the committee recognises that the operation of IEPs and PLPs will be critical for a significant number of children. If the code does not even include a cross-reference, we will have to continue to monitor that area very closely. If many children are relying on IEPs, and if IEPs are not part of the code of practice, that gives them a secondary status. That was our concern. I am content with the rest of the code, but I still have concerns about paragraph 26.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): I share the concerns that Fiona Hyslop has expressed about paragraph 26 and I hope that we can monitor the situation, especially with regard to IEPs. Most schools use the key format that has been piloted. In most—probably all—local authority areas, schools use an electronic format; I

am sorry that there is not a wee bit more emphasis on that.

I was concerned about paragraphs 21, 22 and 23 of the Executive response, on co-operation between local authorities where children have a placing request outwith their local authority. There are already issues around resources and things falling through the net. One of the major issues is assessment. I have had casework in which the local authority that the child was in passed responsibility back to the local authority that the child had come from for an educational psychology assessment; that involved enormous amounts of time and red tape. We may have to look closely at that, because issues will arise. It is right that children should have placing requests, but who is responsible is a bit of a muddle.

The Convener: That is an important point, but the minister has indicated that he intends to write to the committee again on the issue. When that letter comes, we will have a chance to consider the matter again.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I would like to pick up on Rosemary Byrne's point. I am quite disappointed by the failure to amend the code to address that specific concern, to which the former deputy minister was obviously sympathetic. I have discovered since then that although my own area, East Renfrewshire, has a large number of placing requests from Glasgow, Glasgow City Council intends from 14 November not to pay for the additional support that it currently pays for. On that date, when the act is implemented, there will be a cut-off and an expectation that East Renfrewshire Council will immediately make up the difference.

That prospect is alarming, but I have been shown in writing that that is exactly what will happen. In East Renfrewshire, that would mean that the funding for about a dozen special needs auxiliaries, who are currently paid for by Glasgow, would end immediately. On top of that, the implication is that, for all other additional support needs, the support that is supplied by Glasgow—for educational psychologists' services, items of equipment and so on—will end and that the burden will fall on East Renfrewshire Council from now on.

I am not saying that there is not an argument to be had in relation to this matter or that it is not necessary to ensure that the issue of funding for children in relation to the school that they go to is clear. The fact that funding does not follow a child at the moment makes it difficult for local authorities to work out what is happening in relation to such matters.

Taxpayers' money pays for the services and parents and children are not interested in

squabbles between local authorities. I have to say that I do not particularly want to get dragged into the matter when a parent comes to see me, as their MSP, to say that they are anxious about what will happen because no one is picking up their case. The current situation is not a great example of good governance and I think that, through the code, the Executive is in a position to do something about it.

I am extremely worried. It is clear what will happen on 14 November. Several authorities, not only East Renfrewshire, will be affected and, if the committee agrees, I would like us to write to the minister in strong terms—and perhaps send him a copy of the *Official Report* of this discussion—to say what we think will happen on 14 November and ask whether the Executive will take an interest in resolving the matter.

I will give a further example of why there is a problem. Rosemary Byrne said that the mechanism that exists to resolve the matter is not satisfactory. An on-going dispute between East Renfrewshire and Glasgow about one child was raised with the Executive two years ago and has still not been resolved. If there are 2,000 children on placement request in East Renfrewshire and 20 per cent of them have additional support needs, we are talking about 400 children.

The code is a good document. A lot of work has gone into it and it would be damaging to take away the benefits that it will bring to parents, families and local authorities by reducing confrontation. It would be wrong if that were to be overshadowed or damaged by cross-authority squabbles. I would like that point to be drawn to the attention of the minister if that is possible.

The Convener: I am sure that the minister will read the *Official Report*. He has indicated that he intends to respond to us again on this issue. We should emphasise the need to resolve this matter urgently to reduce any potential anxieties or conflicts on the implementation date. It is important that we have an assurance that children will not be made to suffer as a result of bureaucratic squabbling.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I want to say something positive about the fact that the sections of the code concerning transitions from school to further and higher education were developed in consultation with the Association of Scottish Colleges, Universities Scotland and Careers Scotland. Reference is made to that fact in the papers for agenda item 4. The duties of the higher education institutions, in particular, were a matter of concern. I am pleased to see that the Education Department has worked closely with the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department, Universities Scotland and so on in drafting the code.

The Convener: Subject to the comments that we have made, which will appear in the *Official Report*, are members happy to note the response that was received from the minister?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will return to the issue when we receive a response on cross-authority payments.

Subordinate Legislation

Additional Support for Learning (Appropriate Agencies) (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/325)

14:15

The Convener: No motion to annul has been lodged and the Subordinate Legislation Committee has drawn nothing specific to our attention. Do members have any comments on the order?

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): As Elaine Murray mentioned a moment ago, it is good that this issue has been sorted out.

However, I notice that the financial implications of the instrument for further and higher education have not yet been assessed. Given our general concerns about resourcing the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, I am slightly concerned about that. I hope that we can be updated, in due course, when financial information becomes available to us.

Mr Macintosh: Page 2 of the Executive note on the order states:

"The instrument has no financial effects on the Scottish Executive, local government or business."

However, it then states:

"The costs to be borne by the funding have already been identified in Spending Review 2004 for school/college partnership activity."

What costs are those? If they have been identified, how much do they amount to so far? Has a certain sum of money been set aside?

The Convener: The Executive officials who are present are here not for this item, but for the second of the two statutory instruments. However, we can ask the minister to provide us with additional information regarding the costs. My understanding is that the Executive considers that there is enough money in the budget to cover the costs of this item in the current spending review period, but that it will reconsider it in the subsequent spending review. I think that that is what the Executive note is saying, but there would be no harm in asking the minister to provide the committee with some additional information on the financial implications.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I flag up a valid point that has been raised by Skill Scotland. Co-operation between agencies in support of young people is very much to be welcomed, but it is Skill Scotland's hope that appropriate support and guidance will be provided to the other appropriate agencies, so that not just resources but adequate staff time is committed to ensuring that that co-operation is meaningful and effective.

The Convener: Are members content that we ask the minister to provide the committee with some additional financial information regarding the instrument, subject to which we have nothing to report on the Additional Support for Learning (Appropriate Agencies) (Scotland) Order 2005?

Members indicated agreement.

Requirements for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/355)

The Convener: I welcome from the Scottish Executive Dr Mike Gibson, who is the head of the additional support needs division, and Stewart Robertson, who is a team leader in the teachers division. Do members have any questions on the instrument to ask the officials?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: How will local authorities ensure that teachers have the appropriate professional skills and knowledge if they are employed to teach a subject although they are qualified in another subject?

Stewart Robertson (Scottish Executive Education Department): That would depend on the continuing professional development that the teacher has done. The idea is that a teacher gets their initial teacher training qualification but may also have to undertake 35 hours of CPD, which would show whether someone had developed the appropriate professional skills and knowledge to take up another post.

Fiona Hyslop: The instrument relates to teachers who are employed by publicly funded schools, but in the consideration of other legislation concerns were expressed about teachers in private schools. Willingness was expressed by the Scottish Council of Independent Schools that there should be an extension of registration.

Stewart Robertson: To teachers in independent schools?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes.

Stewart Robertson: I am not aware that any decision has been taken on that.

Fiona Hyslop: Would that require future amendment of the regulations?

Stewart Robertson: It would. The regulations are made under section 2 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, which allows ministers to instruct, direct or place responsibilities on authorities. I do not think that the 1980 act gives them the power to place responsibilities on independent schools. Whether that would mean that there would have to be other powers in other parts of the act or whether primary legislation would be needed, I do not know.

Mr Ingram: The Executive note says:

"More recent improvements to educational regulation mean safeguards and provisions which were thought necessary in the context of the 1950s have now become redundant"

and that previous regulations were more about determining school inputs, which tends

"to stifle initiative and modernisation".

Will you flesh that out?

Stewart Robertson: The idea was to increase flexibility, because the Schools (Scotland) Code 1956 was prescriptive about what teachers could do. For example, regulation 5(1) said that a person needed a primary or secondary qualification to teach in a primary school. To teach in a secondary school, a person needed a secondary qualification, although learning support could be provided with a primary qualification. That was it. Little interchange was possible between the two sectors. The idea was to improve that because, in some circumstances, it is appropriate or helpful for a primary teacher to take some secondary 1 or 2 pupils, for example.

The original code was prescriptive and bits of it were removed. A provision that was removed in 2003 determined the number of teachers in primary schools. A rule set class sizes. The code also set the number of principal teachers according to the number of pupils who took a subject for five years.

The code was a child of its time. In the 1950s, schools had teacher shortages and unqualified teachers. Even by 1965, about 5,000 uncertificated teachers taught in Scottish schools. The code was developed against that background. Since then, registration of teachers by the General Teaching Council for Scotland has begun and we are talking about the standard for full registration. We have chartered teachers and a standard for headship. The situation has changed.

Mr Ingram: Regulation 3 says:

"Every education authority shall employ adequate numbers of teachers",

which begs the question. You said that the adequate numbers were stipulated in the old code, but the regulations do not define adequacy.

Stewart Robertson: Adequacy depends on the circumstances. Most authorities staff their schools according to a staffing formula. If an authority failed to do that, that would be a sign of inadequacy. An authority's performance might be due to an inadequate number of teachers. A judgment could be made by such measures.

In some ways, the regulation is almost a long stop. We had such a provision before and the fear is almost that if we did not have it now, we might

need it. If the measure was not included in the regulations, we might have to introduce it later.

Dr Murray: Regulation 8 enables authorities to employ teachers to teach visually or hearing-impaired pupils provided that they are obtaining an appropriate qualification and the time that is taken to do that does not exceed five years. Where did the figure of five years come from? How long does the training take? The time for which unqualified people are allowed to teach seems long.

Dr Mike Gibson (Scottish Executive Education Department): We consulted on the figure. One issue is that the training qualification is modular, so it must be taken over several years. A couple of respondents to the consultation—I think that one was the GTC—asked whether the time could be reduced to three years, but the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf recognised the difficulty. In a sense, we have ended up with five years as the maximum.

We still fall back on regulation 3, which says that teachers—in this case, those who teach youngsters with sensory impairments—must have

"the appropriate professional skills and knowledge".

That is not to say that the teachers do not have the skills to do the job, but it can take five years to obtain a qualification simply because only one, two or three modules are taken a year. That is the issue.

The Convener: I thank you both for giving evidence and ask members whether they wish to make any further comment on the regulations. No motion to annul has been lodged. Do we agree that we have nothing to report on the regulations?

Members indicated agreement.

School Transport

14:25

The Convener: Item 5 is on school transport. We have a letter from the Minister for Education and Young People in response to issues that the committee raised. Does anyone have any comments?

Fiona Hyslop: The correspondence with the minister was useful, if a bit disappointing, although I accept that his letter reflects concerns raised by the local authorities. School transport has been a long-standing issue for the committee following the presentation of two petitions. The matter still comes down to the basic point on page 4 of the letter, which says:

"The statutory walking distance (section 42 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980) refers to a distance beyond which a parent would have a reasonable excuse for keeping a child from school."

The regulations and the law on school transport are nothing to do with school transport; they are to do with the provision of education and excuses for keeping children out of school. That is out of time and out of place.

The minister's letter contains some reasonably positive comments. It notes the Scottish Consumer Council's concerns about the lack of transparency in complaints procedures, which was what led to the petitions being sent to the committee in the first place. The letter reflects on the current Westminster bill and indicates that the Department for Education and Skills retained the current statutory walking distances to ensure that distance is not a barrier to accessing education.

The issue is the extent to which a national Parliament should legislate for local authorities on such matters and how much flexibility can and should be given to local authorities to make decisions. The law is varied but, as we know from the responses from local councils, there are serious concerns about its relevance.

Although legislative change is needed, there is still the issue of risk. We know from our discussions on child protection issues that we have to have a realistic assessment of risk for children. Another factor in the 21st century is that many schools do not start until about 8.40 am, which is relatively late in the morning. For many parents who start work at 9 am, there is no option other than to drive a child to school. That leads to congestion, which is particularly bad in Edinburgh.

Although the Executive has said that it wants joined-up thinking and although there is the let's walk to school initiative and so on, too few children in Scotland are walking to school and far too many

people are in cars doing the school run. Many families—I will mention this sensitively—are concerned about protection and risk. There needs to be national leadership from the Executive on the issue. That may or may not lead to legislative change, but so far the Executive's response does not convince me that the key issues are being addressed. We know from our consideration of the original guidelines that there is not joined-up thinking about changing rural communities, where many of the roads that used to be frequented by children are busy and do not have pavements. There is far more car use. There are the environmental issues that I have mentioned, but there is also the safety issue.

We need to elevate the issue of school transport in Scotland because it impacts on the lives of so many families. We could focus on the areas of protection, risk and safety and on the school day, what that means in reality for many parents and whether it represents a disincentive to walking. We could try to establish whether the Executive can do anything to help to address that. We might ask whether it is a matter only for local authorities or whether it can be dealt with centrally. We should ask the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities whether it considers that it should resolve the issue itself or whether it would be helpful if the committee considered it, too.

14:30

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I suggest that the local authorities' performance should be monitored in future. I am thinking of the Scottish Consumer Council's recommendations for safety checks, the monitoring of contractors' performance, the lack of transparency in complaints procedures and inconsistencies in staff disclosure checks.

The Executive's updated school transport guidance was issued in 2003 and I understand that further updated guidance is likely to be forthcoming with examples—[*Interruption.*] Other members seem to think that that is not the case, but I suggest that we ask the question nonetheless. In his letter, the minister suggests that we will see examples of best practice. Towards the end, he says that he and his officials will continue to work

"with a view to ensuring that school transport policy is well integrated with a range of other relevant policies, and to encouraging the dissemination and application of best practice."

It would be helpful if the Executive could give us examples of best practice and continue its dialogue and co-operation with this committee.

Ms Byrne: It is difficult to look at the issue of walking distance in isolation, as health and safety

is also a concern. Some longer walks are safe whereas some shorter walks are pitted with difficulty because children have to cross main roads and so forth. It is difficult to frame the guidelines simply in terms of walking distance.

Local authorities need to know their own areas. I am pleased that walking distance is to be one of the criteria for new-build schools. Where I live, one of the latest schools to be built was constructed with a network of paths to nearby housing areas, which gives the children a safe walk to school. That is a good move; it is what we should be looking for. Some children need to cross main roads to get to school. Safety, not distance, is the main concern in those cases.

The consistency of safety measures and monitoring on school buses are also concerns. Issues such as safety belts and the condition of buses are still not being tackled. In the Borders, for example, old buses are still being used. Safety belts have just been added to them, but the buses are not purpose built for school transport. Small five-year-olds have to sit in seats that are fit for bigger children. The buses are not particularly safe. I would like a legislative route to be taken on safety and supervision issues.

Mr Macintosh: The money that has been put aside both for the safer routes to school initiative and for school travel co-ordinators has made a big difference, which is encouraging. Although there are still areas of concern, the school travel co-ordinators have addressed issues such as distance versus safety and whether children have to cross main roads. It is not all doom and gloom; the situation is improving.

The Convener: From the discussion, it is obvious that the committee wants to keep the matter open. It is important that we do so. However, we also have to bear in mind that we have a fairly intensive programme over the coming months. Indeed, more legislation appears to be coming our way as a result of the Executive statement this week. We have to ensure that we do not overburden ourselves.

I see no reason why, as a first step, we should not write to COSLA with a copy of the correspondence and the *Official Report* of the meeting. We can ask whether COSLA has any comment to make on the current guidance and whether it wants more central guidance and control or for the issue to be left to the local authorities.

I also suggest that we get the minister to give us an update on progress. We can consider the matter in a little more detail when we look at our work programme at our next meeting. The minister gives a couple of hints in his letter that the guidance is being looked at, but he gives no

timescale for that. He indicates that he thinks that the guidance should be strengthened on a couple of points, but is not more specific. As Lord James said, the letter also mentions best practice. Do members agree that we should invite the minister to attend the committee so that we can ask him about the process and timescale for the review of the guidance?

Members indicated agreement.

Pupil Motivation Inquiry

14.35

The Convener: There is a note from the clerk following our discussions on the pupil motivation inquiry at our away day. Do members have any questions on the approach suggested?

Fiona Hyslop: There is some sense in what is being proposed. However, it might help committee members if they saw the report as currently drafted in the standard format. I think that some members have seen it.

The Convener: It has been circulated to all members, although some might not have received it yet.

Fiona Hyslop: I do not have a copy.

Ms Byrne: Neither do I.

The Convener: If members do not have a copy, they should speak to the clerks. However, the document was sent out with the intention that members should have it before today's meeting. There may have been problems with the mail in Edinburgh last week.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The clerks should be congratulated on putting the report together so ably. However, if I may say so, the presentation of the last paragraph could be strengthened. The Administration may be on the right track on many policies, but we could highlight—

The Convener: You are referring to a draft report that you and I have seen, but which will not be circulated until the next meeting.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Ah.

Mr Macintosh: The draft report is quite a wee document, but I think that the idea is to make it much briefer. It is not a particularly weighty tome at the moment, so how brief do you want to make it? Will it consist of bullet points or will it describe some of the arguments that we heard?

The Convener: It is roughly four pages. It will highlight the main issues that arose out of the inquiry as a stage in the debate on the issue.

Mr Macintosh: Is the idea to pose a set of questions? At the moment, the draft report describes what we heard. It contains some rough conclusions, which we could either firm up or turn into questions for further debate. There is merit in having some of the discussion and argument in neater points; we do not have to quote five different sources each time.

The Convener: Perhaps we could ask the clerks how they went about producing the revised document.

Eugene Windsor (Clerk): Following discussions with the deputy convener and the about-to-be-chosen convener, it was agreed that we would produce a slimmer version of the report to highlight the main points that were covered in the inquiry. The slimmer report will be designed to contribute to the on-going debate rather than to make a set of specific recommendations, as the current draft report attempts to do. It was felt that the slimmer report would be appropriate because, in most of the areas that the inquiry considered, there might be insufficient evidence to make specific recommendations. Given that the committee has done a lot of work on the matter already, it was felt in discussion that it would be more helpful to flag up issues of which the professionals are already aware. We can then hold a future event around those issues to take the debate forward.

The Convener: I suggest that, rather than making a decision in the dark, we go ahead and ask the officials to produce the slimmed-down report for our next meeting. If the committee is content with the slimmer version, we can go ahead with it; if the committee decides that it wants a more traditional report, we can bring back the current draft.

Dr Murray: Will we have both reports then?

The Convener: Members will have seen both versions, so they will know which one they feel more comfortable with. I suggest that as a way forward.

Mr Macintosh: So we will have both reports.

The Convener: The slimmer report will be on the table for discussion next week. However, as members will have seen the traditional-style draft report, if they are not happy with the slimmed-down version, we will be able to ask for the more traditional-style report to be brought back. That is probably the best way forward. Are members content with that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Subject to any decisions that we make next week on the draft report, are members content with the proposals about the format of the stakeholder event that is suggested in paragraph 4 of the clerk's paper? Essentially, the suggestion is that we should invite to the event those who have contributed to the debate so far. They will be divided into small workgroups, each of which will be led by a member of the committee.

Mr Macintosh: Will the event involve, say, half an hour in a plenary session, an hour in a workshop and then a report back to the plenary session for, say, three quarters of an hour? Is that the idea?

The Convener: Yes. Obviously, we have not gone into that much detail, but the idea is that

there will be a plenary session and some workgroup sessions, which will be led by members of the committee.

Ms Byrne: Will we invite the group of teaching professionals with whom we had a round-table discussion? I found that very helpful and informative. I would quite like to hear the feedback that they might give us.

The Convener: Yes. Part of the proposal in paragraph 4 of the clerk's paper is that we should invite those who participated in the inquiry. Obviously, the committee will be given further details on the proposed structure of the event. At the moment, we simply need agreement on the principle, as that will allow the clerks to go ahead with the arrangements and to bring back that further information.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I think that the hope is that we should not tell stakeholders what they already know but try to take the debate further forward.

The Convener: Are members content with the proposals as outlined?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: In that case, I bring this meeting, my first as convener, to a close. Thank you very much for your forbearance. I will try to get better.

Meeting closed at 14:42.

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