

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 14 September 1999
(*Afternoon*)

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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

3rd Meeting

CONVENER:

*Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

*Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

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

*Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP)

Ian Welsh (Ayr) (Lab)

*attended

COMMITTEE CLERK:

Gillian Baxendine

ASSISTANT CLERK:

Alistair Fleming

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 14 September 1999

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:31*]

The Convener (Mrs Mary Mulligan): Good afternoon, everybody. We have an agenda—

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I would like to raise a couple of points of order.

I know that Mike Russell has already discussed this with the committee clerk, but he has asked me to raise formally the fact that he cannot come to meetings of this committee on Tuesday afternoons because the Parliamentary Bureau meets at the same time. However, he is aware of the difficulties of scheduling committee meetings.

The Convener: I have a note of Mike Russell's situation. There are a number of items that I would like to cover this afternoon, one of which is the scheduling of our meetings.

Nicola Sturgeon: You might tell me that we will discuss this later, but my second point of order refers back to the ruling that you made last week that the Minister for Children and Education could not be questioned directly on the teachers' pay negotiations. I do not intend to revisit that issue, as we came to a satisfactory conclusion on the matter, but I would like to raise a point about a connected matter that concerns the bill but is separate from the pay negotiations: the future of the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education.

The day after our meeting last week, the minister said in the chamber—the information was also included in a leaked document—that he was considering proposals to abolish the SJNC and that that would be done by means of an amendment to the improvement in Scottish education bill. The minister should have told us that he planned to make that announcement in the chamber as it would have been useful to have questioned the minister about the proposals. I suggest that he come back to the committee to allow us to pursue the matter.

The Convener: I am happy to ask the minister to reattend the committee to discuss that particular aspect. I do not have a problem with that. It would just be a case of us organising which meeting he should come to, whether the all-party meeting that we have already discussed or another one. I will take your comments on board and we will try to

programme something in. Perhaps we could decide when exactly to hold such a meeting once we are further down the agenda and are putting together the work programme. Is that acceptable?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes.

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I have a point of order.

The Convener: Before I bring you in, Fiona, can I just say which issues I think we should be covering this afternoon.

Fiona McLeod: My point of order relates to the agenda. You began the meeting by saying that we have a running order. Our agenda has two items on it. My first concern is that we receive the agenda at far too short notice and that it does not tell us what we are coming here to discuss. The lack of an opportunity for any other competent business is also an important point. In particular, Hampden does not appear on today's agenda, yet we ended our last meeting by saying that we would request an answer on that from the minister for today's meeting. The fact that it is not on the agenda worries me. What does that mean for the committee in terms of making decisions about future meetings?

The Convener: Your points on the timing of the agenda being made available to members, so that they know exactly what is coming up, and on the way in which the agenda is produced, which—as with lots of things at the moment—is still being developed, will be taken on board.

I wanted to come on to today's agenda and flesh out the two points that are on it. You will see that the issue that you raised has been included on the briefing paper. The first item on the agenda is the committee's future work programme. A number of items have been raised at previous meetings that need to be considered under that item: the teachers' pay dispute and provision for a meeting; the Hampden letter, which I hope all members now have a copy of and have had a chance to look at; our outstanding invitation to Greg Dyke to come to speak to us; and a request from Rhona Brankin, Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport, to attend the committee to discuss whatever the committee wants as well as the national cultural strategy that is currently out for consultation. We are also in the process of setting up a briefing session with sportscotland, which we will try to include.

The paper circulated by the clerk also picks up on a number of issues in which people have an interest and that they want to discuss. Some of those relate to the bill and some to areas within the general remit of the committee, whether education, sport, culture or children.

The next item that I want to address is the timing

of meetings, which comes back to Nicola's point. We are programmed in for every alternate Wednesday morning. That will continue, as it is suitable for all members. However, as we said at the previous meeting, there are concerns about taking our work load forward within that kind of time scale, particularly with the bill to consider. We have, therefore, decided to consider holding additional meetings. That will have repercussions for every member of the committee, because no matter when we timetable meetings for, they will clash with something. My suggestion—I will put it to you now, although we will come back to it later—is that we rotate the time of the additional meetings, so that the same person does not miss meetings or must make a choice about which meeting to attend.

The second item on the agenda covers two issues that dropped off the agenda of the previous meeting—sub-committees and the committee travelling outside Edinburgh—both of which have now been discussed by the conveners committee, so I have some suggestions to put forward.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): Another point that concerns me, and which is not on your list of business, is the length of time that it takes for the *Official Report* of this committee to appear. At our last meeting we were questioning the minister quite closely. For all that we may have written down what was said, it would have been useful the following day to check what was said. It was more than a number of days until the report was available. I understand the strain on resources, but I think it is important that committees have *Official Reports* the day after they meet.

Nicola Sturgeon: Brian has reminded me of another point that Michael Russell asked me to raise. Mike has not received a copy of the *Official Report* from the first meeting or the previous meeting. Could that be looked into?

Gillian Baxendine (Committee Clerk): On the last point, it has now been agreed that all committee members will receive copies of the *Official Report* for each meeting.

Regarding the time scale for publication of the report; at the moment the way that the report is staffed means that producing committee reports the day after committees meet is not possible. The more often committees meet, the worse the situation will get. At the moment all that we can say is that reports will be available before the next meeting of a committee. If members are unhappy with that, they will need to discuss that with the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I think that that is an important point. As Brian said, we did have the ministers

here. If the committee system is going to work, it must get into the nuts and bolts of legislation and of amendments and engage in cross-examination. As Brian has indicated, important issues could come up.

I fully appreciate that official reporters are stretched and cannot be pushed any further. I have seen it with my own eyes. However, there seems to be a presumption—and I hope I am wrong—that the proceedings in the chamber will take precedence over committees. There can be days when proceedings in the chamber are not vastly important, whereas the work of the committees might be.

Without having a go at the official report, we should back Brian.

Fiona McLeod: Gillian said that we could make our views known to the corporate body. We should as a committee make our view known. It is not for us to decide that the chamber should have priority over committees, but it is for the corporate body to ensure that enough staff are employed to do the work of the Parliament.

We are always talking about openness, accessibility, transparency and accountability. If committee reports are not available on the web and in print the day after the committee meets, how can we refer people to what we are doing? If something comes up in the chamber or in committee that people want to know about they must wait for a week for an *Official Report*. Without an *Official Report*, all folk have to go by is what the media presents to them. That is why we have an *Official Report*.

The Convener: That is a very interesting idea and one with which I agree, but we need to take this further. I am happy to take it to the conveners group. That is one way of progressing this, because I am sure that we are not the only committee in this situation. With support from other conveners we might see something happen.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I thought that the computers went down on the day of our previous meeting. Are you saying that that is what the time scale will normally be?

Gillian Baxendine: That is right.

Mr Monteith: I would be satisfied if the issue was taken to the conveners committee. I will also take it further with the Conservative group, and I will ask that it be raised in the bureau.

Work Programme, Sub-committees and Travel

The Convener: We will move on to the substantial issue of the way that the committee's

future work programme could be shaped. There are two items that we have discussed previously. We should perhaps deal with them first.

The first is teachers' pay negotiations. I believe Gillian has some information with which to bring us up to date on that.

14:45

Gillian Baxendine: The closing date for the ballot, which we were told at the previous meeting was 15 September, has been extended to 17 September because of postal difficulties.

Nicola Sturgeon: That means that it might be well into the following week when the results are announced. However—and this relates to the point of order that I raised at the start of the meeting—that is not the same as taking evidence from all the parties to the SJNC about the current negotiations. There is a separate point to be made about the future of the negotiating machinery. I would like the minister to appear before us again as soon as possible—perhaps at our next meeting—to mop up the part of the education bill that we were not able to address with him last week.

The Convener: How do other members of the committee feel about that? The issue of changes to the negotiating machinery was raised the day after we last met, and it has been intimated that they may become part of the bill. We have not had an opportunity to discuss that with the minister. Are members of the committee happy for us to invite him back to our next meeting to talk about it?

Mr Monteith: It is important that we ask him about the ideas that he has for the SJNC. However, I would also like to mention that there is provision in the SJNC's statutes for going to arbitration. Without prejudging the outcome of the ballot, it would be pertinent to ask the minister about his attitude to arbitration as a possible way of resolving this dispute.

The Convener: Anything that may be included in the bill is legitimate for this committee to consider, particularly given that we have already started to examine the process. We will do that.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Am I right, convener, in believing that we will know the result of the ballot by the time of the meeting to which you referred?

The Convener: It has been intimated that the result will not be through until 17 September.

Ian Jenkins: But the result will not be announced on 17 September.

The Convener: No, we are being told that the result will not be available until 21 or 22

September. That will cause us problems, because our meeting is on 22 September.

Nicola Sturgeon: We might know the result of the ballot, but there is an issue that stands alone and is not relevant solely to the current negotiations. I do not want to flog the point, but we should press ahead with that and discuss the state of the negotiations at our next meeting.

The Convener: There are two issues. First, we should discuss the future of the negotiating mechanism, which the minister referred to in the chamber last Thursday in answer to a question, and the possibility that it might be included in the bill. Secondly, following the ballot we should invite along all the parties involved in the negotiations, because we want to hear how each of them views the situation. That is what we had already decided.

Our difficulty is that the ballot process has been put back and might run into our meeting. I suggest that we should not invite everyone for the 22 September but postpone that. Otherwise, if the result were announced on that day people would not have the chance to reach a position on it. Is that acceptable?

Nicola Sturgeon: However, the minister can still appear next week?

The Convener: Yes.

The second item that I suggest we deal with is the Hampden letter. At the end of last week's meeting we agreed to write to the minister for up-to-date information on the Hampden situation. We have received his response. I am sorry that it was so late in coming, but the time scale was fairly short. I hope that people have had an opportunity to look at the letter. I will take questions on that before discussing how we should proceed with the matter.

Fiona McLeod: The letter raises two separate issues. The first relates to Hampden itself. On the basis of this letter, the future of Hampden is still unresolved and open to speculation. The minister says:

"There are no plans for administration, liquidation or receivership."

That was not what came out of the Thursday meeting to which the minister refers, which implied that that was one option that was being considered. We still do not have answers, and there are issues that remain to be resolved. We have to consider who is the guarantor for the Scottish Football Association Museum Trust, for instance—an issue that the minister raises.

The affair also has implications for the role of this committee. Towards the end of the second last paragraph, the minister says:

"It is not for the Scottish Executive to disclose information

of this nature to other parties”.

I take exception to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee being referred to as another party. The sport committee should have been part and parcel of the negotiations on the future of Hampden. If the information is of such a confidential nature, we could have held a meeting in private at which the minister could have discussed it. As we are talking about £40 million of public funds, it is pertinent for the public to know; the public has put that money into Hampden and wants to know what is happening about it. This letter does not answer any of the questions.

The committee should examine the future of Hampden and ask what the committee's role is in considering such issues. Surely the committees are here for a purpose: to achieve something for the voters.

Mr Monteith: This letter is interesting more for what it does not say than for what it does. All it does is provoke further questions. I will run through some of them to give you a flavour of what we might have to do, such as writing another letter or meeting people.

Interestingly, in the third paragraph, the minister says that

“the Scottish Executive is co-operating closely with the major funder,”

and that it was first alerted to possible financial problems in late July. That surprises me because reports of financial problems appeared in early July.

This committee will want to establish what monitoring procedures were in place for the spending of public money. Were members of the Scottish Executive or other public officials able to attend works committee meetings that might have indicated that there were problems? For instance, it has been alleged by a number of commentators that the rush to hold the Scottish cup final in May resulted in extra expenditure that had not been accounted for before. If that was the case, it was before July, so someone should have been monitoring the situation for the taxpayer.

It is also not clear from the letter whether there is a suggestion of misuse of public funds. Obviously, that is what members of this committee are particularly concerned about. There is also the question of the non-payment of McAlpine and where that is going. I understand the commercial sensitivity of that, but, again, I am led to believe that the projected debt for phase 2 is £4 million. Oddly enough, that seems to be the same figure for which McAlpine is awaiting payment. I am also led to believe that the projected debt will rise to £6 million if the lecture theatre is completed. Does that mean that the lecture theatre can proceed? What are the plans if it does not proceed, as,

presumably, it is built into the business plan that the lecture theatre will bring revenue into the stadium?

Furthermore, the letter does not mention the departure of the finance chief of the project, an event that occurred on the same day that the fraud squad arrived at the stadium. That may be coincidental, but, again, we will want to have more information about that. Similarly, it has been alleged that there has been some settlement to the departing financial director. If there has been a problem and a settlement has been made, we should know whether that settlement is coming out of public funds.

A number of people, including subcontractors, have told me that they are awaiting payment and that they, in turn, have not paid further contractors whom they have engaged. Those subcontractors are in negotiations with McAlpine, whom they are subcontracted to. A chain of events is being created for contractors throughout the Scottish construction industry and, while a larger firm such as McAlpine might be able to take it on the chin by restructuring its finances, smaller companies will be in particular difficulty.

Many questions have been left unanswered. I accept that there are commercial sensitivities to consider, but we need more information. I agree with Fiona that, even if it has to be in private, we need reassurance that proper procedures are in place to monitor and resolve the situation.

Mr Macintosh: Brian asked who is monitoring the project and whether there has been a misuse of public funds. Those are fair and pertinent questions, but I am not sure that the Executive is the body to answer them. A lot of bodies are responsible for the—

Fiona McLeod: That is why I asked, back on 3 August, that the committee meet to bring all those bodies together, rather than just the minister.

Mr Macintosh: Two different points are at issue. Fiona is absolutely right that there is a case to be answered, but do we want to make the matter our No 1 priority and do we want to speak only to Sam Galbraith? A lot of other bodies are involved.

Fiona McLeod: That is what I have been saying; many co-funders—I think that is what they call themselves—are involved. The matter should be a priority; we are talking about the national stadium.

The Convener: Can we come to that later? First, I want to answer some points that have been raised so far. I am not here to answer for the Executive's letter, but given that the letter is here in black and white, we must assume that these are the Executive's answers and that they are true.

The suggestion that there is information to the

contrary makes matters very difficult. It is obvious that further questions will arise from the letter and that we have concerns. Part of the difficulty is that there is still a misunderstanding about how our committees operate. Perhaps it is taking some time for those of us who come from a local authority background to realise that we operate slightly differently here. It is for the Executive, as the Government, to progress such matters and deal with any difficulties.

I share everyone's general concern about any possible misuse of public funds. However, a large amount of lottery money is involved in the project and specific procedures exist for the regulation of that money; there are people whose responsibility it is to take that on board and to ask questions about how lottery money is being spent. Hence, we did not have the emergency meeting that Fiona suggested because at that stage it was not for the committee to become that involved.

We have now asked for information as a committee, we have a letter in front of us and, if the committee so wishes, we can ask further questions of the Executive about the handling of this matter. I add one slight note of caution, in that there is no doubt that much commercial sensitivity is involved. While we could take the information in private, I am always reluctant to hold meetings in private. The committee must be seen to be operating openly and we should be prepared to conduct as much business as possible in public, although that will involve difficulties in relation to commercial sensitivity.

No matter how hard we try to hold meetings of this size in private, there will always be leaks somewhere. That could cause problems for those whom we are actively trying to protect—the general public, whose money is being spent—and for the future of the national stadium. We must bear that in mind when we make our decision.

In terms of whether members want to proceed, are there any suggestions or questions that are still unanswered?

15:00

Mr Monteith: Rather than ask Sam Galbraith along, we should consider asking Rhona Brankin. Financial support has been received not only from the Scottish Executive but from sportscotland and other bodies, so it may be more appropriate for Rhona Brankin to answer our questions and assure us that the Executive is on top of the matter and that our fears are groundless.

Fiona McLeod: One of the roles of the committees is to monitor what the Executive is doing. Ultimate responsibility for monitoring Hampden rests with the Scottish Executive, and responsibility for monitoring the Executive rests

with the committees. As this committee is responsible for sport, we should call the relevant minister before us to answer all the unanswered questions. To say that we cannot do that because there may be a leak is rather a slur on fellow committee members. I hope that we all take the matter seriously; it is a major financial problem that affects everybody in Scotland. If we cannot get access to the answers, nobody can.

The Convener: I must stress that I was not suggesting that leaks would come from the committee.

Mr Macintosh: The Executive has a limited role in the Hampden affair. We have put questions to Sam Galbraith and he has given a detailed response. As he says in the second-last paragraph:

"Matters are at an extremely sensitive stage."

He has given us all the information that he can at the moment. Getting him or Rhona Brankin back to answer more questions will take us no further forward.

If we want to take matters forward we must allow the rescue package to be put in place. We could speak to the big investors—the private builders, the Millennium Commission or whoever—but it would not be helpful to bring back the ministers.

Ian Jenkins: I agree with Kenneth. We should wait until the rescue package is fixed. Are people worried about the future of Hampden or are they trying to stir things? I would like to give the minister and his team a chance. His letter says:

"Matters are at an extremely sensitive stage."

We should give them time and come back to the issue in a month.

Fiona McLeod: I have to disagree with Ian on that point.

Ian Jenkins: I thought she might.

The Convener: May I suggest a way forward? I was going to ask whether we should invite Rhona Brankin to the meeting to discuss the national cultural strategy. If we do that, perhaps we should add to the agenda some questions about the up-to-date position on Hampden.

I foresee two restrictions. First, examination of the minister could not take place within the next couple of weeks, because the next two meetings will be taken up with other items. Secondly, if the minister says that she cannot give us the information, either because it is confidential or because the Executive is not involved, the committee would have to accept that we will have to find the information by other means.

Should we ask Rhona Brankin about Hampden when we call her to discuss the national cultural

strategy?

Fiona McLeod: You said that, depending on the minister's answer, we may have to find other ways of getting the information. Should not we be doing that now? The sports committee of the Scottish Parliament ought to be asking the people involved to come and tell us what they propose, and there may be things that we can suggest to them.

The Convener: This is a sensitive matter. We had a similar discussion about the teachers' pay negotiations. If people are involved in fairly sensitive negotiations, should we put them on the spot and make them give hard and fast answers, or should we give them flexibility to come to a resolution?

Fiona McLeod: Do not we have a role to play?

Nicola Sturgeon: Fiona rightly asks whether we have a role to play. I would put it more strongly: we have an obligation to get involved. It is not a question of putting organisations on the spot; it is a question of this committee keeping itself abreast of the situation and ensuring that we are in possession of all the relevant information at any particular time.

We are all aware that the situation is sensitive and fluid, but we must ensure that we have as much information as possible. We can arrange, at fairly short notice, meetings at which we can be briefed and brought up to date by organisations; and, as Fiona says, we may be able to offer some helpful advice—however unlikely that sounds. We should arrange such briefings, and do so as soon as they can be fitted into our schedule.

The Convener: I want to bring this discussion to a close, because we are in danger of going around the houses 10 times. I will call Ken and Brian, and then we will try to come to an agreement.

Mr Macintosh: In principle, I agree with keeping up to date with developments, but it is not our job to run the national stadium.

Nicola Sturgeon: Nobody is suggesting that.

Mr Macintosh: The trouble is that our time is limited. To devote hours of committee time to replace, in effect, whatever body is running the national stadium at the moment, is not—

Nicola Sturgeon: With respect, I think that you misunderstand what is being said.

Mr Monteith: I know all about commercial sensitivity; I have had a business that went bust. I know what it is like and what people are experiencing. I know the fears of the punters about whether they will have a stadium. What are this Parliament and its committees for? Is it to tidy up after something has gone wrong and so do what could have been done by Government-appointed committees anyway? Or is it to have a role in

doing something?

I am not accusing Mr Galbraith's letter of not telling the truth, I am just saying that some things are not in it. I gave a long list of questions that I think are pertinent. I appreciate that some of them could be injudicious at this moment—the question of the financial director and the fraud investigations, for example. However, the question of who is monitoring the use of public funds is not commercially sensitive or damaging, and the questions of whether the Scottish cup final cost extra money and whether the lecture theatre can go ahead are pertinent.

There is a role for us. The public expect the Parliament and its committees to be involved—as we were last week—not to make things worse, but to find ways of allaying people's fears and bringing people together. We should at least ask Rhona Brankin—so that we do not get sick of the sight of Sam Galbraith—some questions that are not commercially sensitive.

The Convener: How do members feel about inviting Rhona Brankin to a future meeting and including in the agenda questions on the up-to-date position of Hampden and on our ability to ask questions?

Fiona McLeod: That would be fine. As you and Kenneth have said, there is a time problem, but there is a time problem for Hampden as well.

At the end of the letter, Sam says:

"I shall continue to keep you informed."

While negotiations are going on, we should ensure that, even if ministers do not come and sit in front of us, they keep this committee informed about what is happening at each step of the way. There is lot of speculation at the moment and that does not create a healthy atmosphere for organisations to conduct their negotiations. We need openness and we, as a committee, need to be informed.

The Convener: We are all keen that this should be resolved. We would be more than happy to lend any assistance that we can. Do we agree to invite the minister and, in the meantime, to ask the Scottish Executive to keep us informed of any substantial movement, as promised in the letter?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Rhona has asked to attend a meeting of this committee to discuss the cultural strategy, which I think we would like to hear some views on. The consultation process on the strategy is open; it is due to finish at the end of October. As with the education bill, it would be useful for us to have a discussion at this stage. Do we agree to that invitation being extended?

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Yes, and it is important that it happens sooner rather than

later, given the time scale that is involved. While I appreciate the importance of the previous topic, I would hate it to overshadow our agenda to the extent that we had only 10 minutes to discuss the cultural strategy and were unable to pinpoint some of the important issues about the method of consultation. I want to ensure that Rhona comes sooner rather than later, and that there is time to discuss the cultural strategy.

The Convener: That is agreed. We will arrange for the meeting to take place as soon as possible.

On the invitation to Greg Dyke, I have had contact with his office, although not directly with him—he seems to be busy. It has been difficult to suggest a meeting date that is suitable for us all. In the meantime, I have had a meeting with people from BBC Scotland, who made a suggestion on which I would appreciate members' comments—that is, those members who are still in attendance.

Cathy Peattie: Perhaps we should have a break for press releases, and then we could get on with our work. It seems to be standard procedure in this committee for members to leave during meetings. It happened at the previous meeting, when a press release was scheduled to occur 20 minutes into the committee meeting. That is not the best way of conducting business.

The Convener: It would be more productive if committee members were here for the whole of the meeting.

Mr Stone: Shall we adjourn?

Members: No.

The Convener: We will continue, as we have a lot to get through and members do not have time to hang about.

As I was saying, it was suggested that first we invite John McCormick, the controller of BBC Scotland, to address us on that organisation's future policy and programme scheduling, and that we then meet with the newly appointed governor, Sir Robert Smith, who is keen to meet us and give us his views on a number of issues relating to broadcasting. By that stage, we will have a diary date that suits everyone for meeting Greg Dyke. By then he will have had a chance to take up his post and get a handle on those issues that we consider are most important in Scotland. Is that acceptable to the committee?

15:15

Nicola Sturgeon: If Greg Dyke is having difficulties co-ordinating his diary with our schedule of meetings, perhaps we could accommodate him outside our normal schedule. It is important to meet him as soon as we can.

The Convener: I think that we will take that

suggestion on board. Obviously, as Mr Dyke is finishing one job and starting another, there will be problems with diary dates. We will talk about having extra committee meetings later, because the issue seems to throw people.

Sportscotland also wishes to brief us. We have circulated possible dates for that briefing and will let committee members know which date is most suitable.

Can we now turn to the items on the list?

Mr Macintosh: Before we go further, can I add an item to the list?

The Convener: Do you have to?

Mr Macintosh: I was too late on Monday to phone Gillian. Can I add Gaelic education to the list?

The Convener: We have a note of that already.

Mr Macintosh: Another item that is part of our culture brief is the Scottish music business. I am quite happy to include that, because it is not an issue by itself.

The Convener: Gillian will make a note of that.

At an earlier meeting, Nicola asked how we would timetable committees while the education bill was before Parliament and whether the bill would take over our lives. Although the bill is important and we will have a strict timetable to discuss aspects of it, I am keen not to lose sight of other areas within our remit. Is that a general feeling?

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree with that. I imagine that this part of our debate will be structured with difficulty. For the next few months, the bill will form a major part of the committee's business and I hope that we will discuss whom we will take evidence from, because I have some ideas about that.

The bill concentrates on some internal changes to the education system to improve Scottish education. However, when we consider the bill, we should also investigate areas that are outside the education system but impinge on educational achievement. Matters such as poverty, the state of school infrastructure, civic education and sustainability are already on our list. We have to examine improvements in Scottish education as a whole, rather than just the changes proposed in the bill; if we structure our discussions to reflect that, it might be easier to see our way forward.

The Convener: You are correct to say that the bill will not cover every improvement that is needed in education; as Sam said, there are other ways of making changes without using legislation. We examine the bill and agree on which aspects to concentrate. We can then discuss whether to

call witnesses or to ask someone to brief us on the issues. After that, we can investigate educational issues concerning sport and culture that lie outside the scope of the bill. At the end, we will get clever and prioritise issues that, because they lie outside the bill, are not subject to a strict timetable.

At the previous meeting, I mentioned that it was becoming apparent that the clerks and the research team supporting the committee were greatly overworked. The researchers, in particular, have to work for more than one committee. They are pleading with us to decide a structure for how we want to progress, so that they can create a work plan to enable us to get as much information as possible.

Mr Monteith: I realise that discussion of sub-committees is under the second item of business. Are we establishing the scope of business at the outset before we decide on that? There is already an awful lot of work, irrespective of the bill that we will investigate. Matters that we want to take on arise weekly. What are your thoughts about how we proceed, given that we will not make a decision about sub-committees until after we have discussed the business?

The Convener: I would be happy to discuss sub-committees first if Mr Monteith would like to do so.

Mr Stone: I support what has been said and believe that what we are doing is correct. However, I have a worry about how we decide our schedule. As you know, I have never experienced Westminster, but my understanding is that committees there decide what their priorities are and establish the order of what will be examined. A pressing issue is taken on board owing to a particular circumstance or after pleading from a member or group of members. The committee then decides whether to rejig its timetable.

It is important that we get this right; that was where I was coming from last week in our discussions with Sam about the bill, notwithstanding the points made by Mike and Nicola. Once we have decided that we are doing something, I will have to be convinced of the need to rejig the schedule. We must be careful not to become a reactive committee. The deadly danger is that we stray from the detailed examination of legislation. I have a lot of points that I want to make about the education bill, as I am sure we all have. We should establish a list of priorities and a code of conduct as to how we take forward an issue that might spring up to do with Gaelic—as Ken mentioned—or with our constituencies.

Mr Monteith: As there is going to be a lot of work, sub-committees will allow us to examine matters other than the bill, which could dominate our work. The diary problems for sub-committee

meetings are easier to resolve than they are for committee meetings; when five of us cannae make a certain date, the problem is easier to resolve than it is among 11 members. Other members of the committee would not be prevented from attending the sub-committee meeting and culture or sports matters could be brought to the sub-committee's attention. As we know from the standing orders, a sub-committee could not do something without the eventual agreement of the committee. Setting up sub-committees would allow flexibility and enable us to discuss problems that arise.

Mr Stone: I would welcome that. The danger is that if we take our eye off the ball—on legislation, for example—we are failing in our duty. The tension between the Executive and committees is built into the system. If we make a hash of things, we will wreck the system at the beginning. Given the comments in our papers about sub-committees, I am interested in your thoughts about how we should progress.

The Convener: Members will each have received a paper on sub-committees. There are certain procedures that we must go through to establish a sub-committee. At the conveners meeting, the general feeling was that establishing a sub-committee was a lot of trouble, although it would be of benefit for a few members to examine an issue. An informal group could consist of four members, so that there is one member from each party—in a formal sub-committee, there must be proportionality, which would create a ridiculous situation.

Fiona McLeod: Brian would be a busy man.

Mr Monteith: I have no other committees, so I am relaxed about that.

The Convener: There would be difficulties in setting up a sub-committee in that way, so I feel that we should have ad hoc arrangements. We should ask members to examine specific items and return to the committee with information that they have gathered in small groupings—here or elsewhere. Such an informal way of advancing things would be more beneficial for committees than the formal structure of sub-committees would.

Fiona McLeod: On that point, Mary, what power would such a level of informality have to bring folk to us? If, for example, we have an informal grouping to discuss sport, and we want people from sportscotland to come and explain something to us, they might go, "You're not a committee. We don't have to come."

The Convener: In standing orders, there is someone called a reporter—although the actual name has not yet been chosen. A reporter would be empowered to request all the information that a committee is empowered to request. My

understanding is that there would be no restrictions on a small group of committee members asking exactly what we would be asking as a whole. Such an exercise would in no way be seen as second class, and that group could take on board only the information that we would be looking for.

Gillian Baxendine: An informal briefing would not be a proceeding of the Parliament; it would not have the full powers or protection of a parliamentary proceeding. The committee would always be behind it, however; any difficulties encountered would be referred back to the committee.

Fiona McLeod: Therefore, the informal briefing would not be in the *Official Report*.

Gillian Baxendine: The findings could be read into the minutes of the meeting. It would not be an official report of a parliamentary proceeding, but we would get a report of what the committee adopted at the subsequent meeting.

Cathy Peattie: I can see the value of people looking at the time scale of our work, but I am concerned about sidelining things. Two or three people would go off to do a piece of work—their meetings would not have an official report—they would bring it back to committee and it would end up getting lost. I can see that happening with the sort of agenda that we have. I am not saying that the idea of a sub-committee or working group is not a good idea—I think that it is a good idea—but I want to ensure that such a group could ask to consult particular people and could make recommendations to the committee. If that did not happen, a lot of time could be wasted in taking particular issues forward.

The Convener: We would have to ensure that there was some structure to what people were doing. I would not want four members to go away, take evidence and discover that their work was wasted. It would be important for those members to deal with a specific remit: after they take evidence or have briefings, they would have to report back to the committee. That would become part of the committee agenda and so would go on the record.

Fiona McLeod: What is the quorum for this committee?

Gillian Baxendine: Three.

Fiona McLeod: We do not actually need sub-committees—members need not turn up to deal with things in which they are not interested.

The Convener: That is right.

Fiona McLeod: We could call it a committee all the time.

Nicola Sturgeon: Can it be any three who make

up the quorum?

Mr Monteith: I see what is on your mind—you mean people such as yourself? [*Laughter.*]

Nicola Sturgeon: Me?

Mr Stone: That is an old trick.

Fiona McLeod: You cannot have committee meetings that way. Where is your diary, Mary?

Mr Monteith: There is some sense in what Fiona says, but members of this committee should not feel obliged to turn up and should not be under pressure. Goodness me, if the committee had two meetings a week, I could not make both. I am coming at this from a different angle. If this committee met twice a week, members would feel under pressure to attend.

Cathy Peattie: We have to be clear why we need working committees. We agree that they will take very important items forward and bring back findings to the committee. An ad hoc arrangement would be inappropriate. We need a time scale and terms of reference for the pieces of work that we do, so that members are clear about what is expected of them and about the status of the work that they bring back. Otherwise, we might say, "It's only art," or, "It's only sport, so it doesn't matter." I do not think that that would give all the issues that we cover a fair say.

If we are going to pursue that idea, we should agree, as a group, terms of reference for each piece of work, who will undertake it, how the information is to be brought back to the committee and the status of that information.

15:30

The Convener: Yes, but there would need to be an understanding that it would not be a formal sub-committee. I say that only because of the procedures that we have to go through to establish a sub-committee. Perhaps Gillian can expand on that.

Gillian Baxendine: In order to establish a sub-committee, a motion must go from the bureau to the Parliament for approval. The committee would need to go through the bureau to obtain agreement.

The Convener: That is a rather long-winded route.

Mr Monteith: Is there a concern that the bureau might not agree to move such a motion if we asked it to?

The Convener: It is not so much that; rather, the concern is about the time that it would take. If we meet on a Wednesday and decide that we want to establish a sub-committee, the issue would be put off by a week, as the bureau does

not meet until the following Tuesday. During that time, we could have agreed an informal group and the members involved could have met on the Tuesday and prepared a report ready to come back to the committee. It is more to do with time and the formal procedure that must be followed than anything else.

Mr Stone: For the sake of argument—members can disagree with me—we could simply ask for three sub-committees on sport, education and culture, with four members on two of the sub-committees and three members on the third. We could try to achieve political balance, although we cannot get all four parties on the three-man—sorry, the three-person—committee, but would that not be a simple request to submit to the bureau?

The Convener: The difficulty with that approach, Jamie, is that I guarantee that the issue that a member is interested in would be on the agenda for a different sub-committee, and that is why I am reluctant to get into that situation.

Can we move on?

Nicola Sturgeon: I wish to raise a point for clarification, convener. Jamie talked about all parties, but, given the new politics and the coalition, does that mean that Labour and the Liberal Democrats would have to be represented separately on sub-committees, or would they have only one representative?

Ian Jenkins: Nicola, to be honest, I hope that we would not need to worry about the representation of the parties on these groups. It should not be a consideration.

Nicola Sturgeon: But we have been told that it is a consideration.

Ian Jenkins: I know that. We have been told that because someone said that we should try to get a balance between the four parties, which would be all right. However, we should try to work together and see whether there are four members who, as a group, would come back to the committee and report on sport or culture, without always following party lines.

Nicola Sturgeon: I would be happy with that.

Ian Jenkins: That is great.

The Convener: If we have an informal arrangement, we do not need to have a representative from each party, which would let Brian off occasionally. Gillian will correct me if I am wrong, but, on formal sub-committees, the standing orders say that there must be proportionality, which is another difficulty. On establishing sub-committees, the standing orders say that the committee

“shall have regard to the balance of political parties in the

Parliament”.

Nicola Sturgeon: I think that people would be happy with an informal arrangement, taking on board Cathy's point about ensuring that there was both structure and accountability, which was a good point.

The Convener: I agree with that. We are clear about what we are looking for, what we are trying to find out and how we report back to the committee. Those reports would be recorded as part of the committee's business.

Mr Monteith: May I give an example? We are reaching a form of consensus—oh, hush my mouth—

Nicola Sturgeon: Brian, can you spell consensus?

Mr Monteith: I spell it with a “k”.

Mike is not here, but I know that Scottish Screen is dear to his heart. A number of studio developments are proposed, but we might feel that that issue is too detailed for us, as a large committee, to consider. However, we could set up a group to consider the number of applications that are made for studio developments.

Fiona McLeod: I take it that, rather than an ad hoc or informal group, we are discussing point 6 of the paper on sub-committees, which reads:

“A committee may appoint different reporters to report to it on different competent matters”.

This would be a formal, rather than an informal, appointment of a rapporteur, which would have all the formality of a sub-committee without the bureaucracy.

The Convener: I think that that is what the committee is looking for.

Ian Jenkins: On occasion, we could send Mike Russell away and tell him to come back and report to the committee. We can trust these people—why not?

The Convener: That might be rash.

Mr Stone: One of the things that defines members of the Liberal party is that they are trusting, nice people.

Mr Monteith: I look forward to the day Ian says the same thing about me.

The Convener: On that note of consensus, we move on to a more difficult issue, which is prioritising what we will deal with. A number of specific issues about the improvement in Scottish education bill were raised at our previous meeting and have been again since then. Does anyone wish to add anything to that list?

Nicola Sturgeon: I would like to add a few

items, but before I go through them, I want to comment on the approach here. A fair representation of the issues came out of last week's meeting, but I am reluctant to see the committee define too closely the issues in the education bill that we think are important. I would rather approach it from the point of view of identifying the bodies, organisations or individuals that we would like to hear from; they may raise issues that we had not thought of. Any list of issues that we agree on now is not definitive.

I would like to add to our list the matter of placing requests, which did not come out in the meeting last week, although it probably would have done if we had had more time. There is the issue of the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education—which might be built into the bill at a later stage—and that of devolved school management, which is slightly more vague. I suggest that we take evidence from an expert in public law.

A large part of the bill involves proposals to place duties on elected ministers and local authorities. Last week, we discussed how those duties should be defined and enforced—or, more appropriately, how the public enforces those duties. It would be interesting and instructive to hear the views of a public lawyer about how meaningful it is to say that the Minister for Children and Education is under a legal duty and whether that has any real meaning.

Mr Monteith: The Law Society of Scotland could advise us who is the most appropriate lawyer to speak to the committee.

Nicola Sturgeon: We probably want to hear from an academic rather than a lawyer.

Fiona McLeod: There is no mention of school libraries in the bill. I would like the committee to look into that and take evidence on the fact that school libraries improve standards in schools.

Cathy Peattie: It may well be deliberate, but there seems to be next to nothing on community education in the bill. It is important but it is not there. I am talking about informal learning.

Mr Stone: There is a great deal of uncertainty in community education in Scotland. The way forward is not at all clear, and conflicting messages have been coming out for some years. The committee would be well advised to address that issue—we would be doing a service to the whole of Scotland.

The Convener: The committee will remember that we do not have sole responsibility for community education, as we share it with the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee.

Cathy Peattie: In terms of youth work? Working with young people is an integral part of the work.

The Convener: Yes.

Mr Stone: There is a culture spin-off from it as well, which those of us who have been councillors have all seen.

Fiona McLeod: Cathy, are you talking about community education in terms of the bill or in general?

Cathy Peattie: Community education should be included in the bill in some way.

Ian Jenkins: The bill is really about schools and education.

Cathy Peattie: It talks about including young people in education and addressing issues about community schools as part of a holistic approach to education. For me, community education is also an holistic approach to education.

Mr Stone: Community education is often based in schools. To take a community school such as Balerno, the lead community education person is on the management team of the school. I recommend that the committee looks at Balerno as an example, to help sweep up some of those issues, including community education. I see Brian nodding—that is a good sign.

Mr Macintosh: I assumed that we would talk about the whole bill. The bill is all about standards and how information is assessed, gathered and used. It is important to look into that and the role of HM inspectors of schools.

The Convener: It is useful for members of the committee to get an idea of the issues that they think are important at this stage, but that does not mean that other issues will not arise later. As Nicola Sturgeon pointed out, if we invite people to speak to us, they may raise aspects of the matter that we had not thought of. Our list of subjects is just a guide; it is not prescriptive in any way.

Let us move on to decide whom we want to invite to address the committee or to prepare briefings for us.

Nicola Sturgeon: As an opening gambit, I have a number of organisations to suggest, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the main teaching unions, and the General Teaching Council, whose paper should not be ignored in our consideration of the bill. I also suggest Her Majesty's inspectors, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the Scottish School Boards Association and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council.

The Child Poverty Action Group should also be included, as its work concerns standards in education. A representative from the group could give us a public law briefing. Also, as Brian Monteith mentioned last week, we should speak to a representative from St Mary's Episcopal Primary

School, the only remaining opted-out school. That is not an exhaustive list.

Ian Jenkins: The Scottish Qualifications Authority is notable by its absence from the list. Someone from that organisation should come to speak to us.

Fiona McLeod: Pre-school education is going to become statutory for the first time, so we need advice from pre-school bodies.

Cathy Peattie: The Scottish Pre-School Play Association needs to be involved, as it is interested not only in pre-school provision, but in parental involvement in that provision. On community education and community development, we should invite the Community Development Foundation.

The Convener: I note Nicola's suggestion that we should consult the Child Poverty Action Group. A number of agencies that deal with children will have a view on the education bill and its impact on children. It is not the only group that could contribute, but it is one that should be considered.

Nicola Sturgeon: Other members may be aware that the Child Poverty Action Group is lobbying for an amendment to the bill to extend eligibility for free school meals. That is why I am suggesting that organisation, but I realise that other bodies may have something to contribute.

The Convener: I too am in touch with the Child Poverty Action Group and I am aware of the debate on school meals. There is some discussion about whether that falls within our remit, as free school meals are currently provided as part of the benefits system.

Mr Macintosh: We must not be slaves to pressure groups. All those groups have remits of their own and we do not want simply to hear from one group after another. Rather, we should go out to schools and meet children and teachers.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is a dangerous view to take. None of the organisations that I have listed could be described as pressure groups; they are representative organisations.

Mr Macintosh: I am not trying to put them down.

Nicola Sturgeon: We must hear the opinions of those who will have to implement and deal with the decisions that are made by this Parliament. I dissociate myself completely from a description of some of those organisations as mere pressure groups.

15:45

The Convener: I remind members to go through the chair, as a number of members have been

waiting to speak.

Mr Monteith: I agree about the organisations that have been mentioned. The only one on your list that I did not hear mentioned is the Scottish Council of Independent Schools, which is included for consultation on the education bill and is likely to be included in the General Teaching Council for Scotland section that will no doubt be added. Because there are implications for registration procedures and because an independent school member of the GTC is a possibility, the Scottish Council of Independent Schools should be asked, as I am not entirely sure that we will hear from it what we think we might.

The Convener: We now have some suggestions.

Ian Jenkins: They can have 10 minutes each.

Fiona McLeod: Following from what Ken said, I think that the idea of going out and talking to people is lovely, but we should not fall into the trap of what we heard from ministers last week—of thinking that if we go out and talk to people they can talk to us and we can learn something. Examining ways of getting information from people—especially young people—is down on the list somewhere. Before we meet people, we should ensure that we will do so in a way that is appropriate and will achieve something—rather than everybody saying, "Thanks for coming to see us."

Mr Macintosh: I certainly did not want to give the impression that I am putting down any organisations—the use of the term pressure groups was wrong. I am quite happy with all of those organisations. I agree with Fiona that we want to make sure that we hear from children.

The Convener: I ask the committee to bear with me. There are a number of people whom we want to invite. I am happy to work with the committee clerk to arrange for those people and others representing various interests to come to the committee in an ordered way, so that we can speak to as many as possible. I take on board the point that we must not lose sight of the other areas that are covered by the committee. I will work with Gillian to produce a programme to show when people will come to the committee.

Mr Stone: Given what I was saying last week about school structures, revenue and capital, can I take it that the representative of COSLA who comes to see us will be the appropriate person from the distribution committee—either the chairman or the clerk of services, who seem to be the key people in the matter of capital?

The Convener: Will such a meeting come under the bill section, or under the more general education part?

Mr Stone: That is a fair point. Maybe, it should come under the more general education part, but I hope that you will bear in mind what I said.

The Convener: Very much so.

We will move on to areas of education that are not immediately seen as being part of the bill. I say that carefully, as I am aware that people might want to include or knock out things further down the line. We will move on to items that we have not yet considered to be part of the bill, but which are still education issues. You have the list in front of you; do people want to add anything to that?

Mr Monteith: I gave a number of items that are outwith the bill to Gillian. They are: Steiner/Waldorf schools; foreign language teaching in primaries; the teaching of Scottish history; and, although it should be addressed later as it requires some time, class sizes and pupil:teacher ratios.

The Convener: Can we take on board Ken's point about including Gaelic education in this?

Ian Jenkins: I suggested the item on current initiatives in secondary education; the list specifies higher still, but I meant that as just an example. Other matters such as five to 14 and testing are also important and although they have not yet been discussed at meetings, we should cover them at some time.

Nicola Sturgeon: I do not have anything to add to the list of issues, but I have a view on what our priorities should be.

The Convener: It would be useful to hear about members' priorities. We could then draw up a timetable for the committee to agree to.

Nicola Sturgeon: It is obvious that we will want to take evidence on the education bill from a range of organisations, but further to Jamie's point, if COSLA representatives are here to talk about the education bill, there is no reason why we cannot kill two birds with one stone. Of course, COSLA would have to be told in advance that we wanted to ask questions on other matters.

Regarding our priorities, we have a four-year term so we do not have to do everything at once, but it would be useful, as we consider the bill, to consider other important matters that impinge on educational achievement. First there is the issue of resources, about which there is a war of statistics in education. It would be useful if the committee could throw some light on the real position of local councils regarding education funding. Secondly there is the link between poverty and educational achievement and the state school infrastructure. In addition, parts of the curriculum—civic education, sustainability—are not easily measured.

We should keep higher still as a standing item

that might need to be looked at; I have a feeling that higher still may have life in it yet, in terms of controversy. We should also consider the procedure whereby small and rural schools are closed or earmarked for closure.

I have two issues to raise about children, but are we discussing that topic now?

The Convener: No, not yet; we will discuss it separately.

Cathy Peattie: I would like us to consider how the youth culture strategy impinges on our schools; that may be a crossover issue. I agree that Gaelic is important, but we must have a mechanism to encourage children to speak and learn Scots language in schools. Music and culture, as we knew them, are disappearing from schools and we need a positive strategy to bring them back. We talk about poverty and we want to ensure that young children have a voice, but it is bad for children's confidence if they cannot use their mother tongue to express their opinions. We should consider the whole issue of culture and language.

The Convener: It is clear that members want the curriculum to develop to include subjects such as culture, sport and the use of Gaelic and Scots language. We also think that education has a role to play in teaching some kind of civic responsibility. That is perhaps being squeezed at the moment and we may want it to be further up our agenda.

Nicola suggested that if we have COSLA here to discuss the education bill, we could go on to discuss Jamie's point. There could be procedural difficulties with that because if two or three other bodies also attend that meeting to give evidence, we may run out of time. We will need to feel our way a bit. It would be useful to ask COSLA about other matters while we have the opportunity, but on the other hand it could cause difficulties with other invited bodies.

Nicola Sturgeon: I understand that.

The Convener: We will see how things go with that one. There seems to be quite a lot that we could take on board. Shall we deal now with the issues under the heading of children and young people?

Nicola Sturgeon: Child-centred policies and the UN convention on the rights of children are among those issues. Perhaps rather than becoming involved in working out what should be happening, we should push the Executive—which has made statements about those issues—to say what it is doing.

I put two other issues on the agenda, the first of which is new opportunities funding. There is an anomaly at the moment, as education and child

care are completely devolved but lottery funding—which is quite substantial for child care—is still a reserved matter, and the Parliament has no control over the spending of that money. Would it be appropriate for this committee to talk to someone from the new opportunities fund to ensure that its priorities match ours? There is an anomaly in the system.

The second issue arises out of children's hearings. I have been involved in a case that was featured in the *Sunday Mail*, and I would like to raise the issue of how children's panels operate. I specifically raise the issue of warrants and how they have been implemented by the police. That is a minor issue, but one that we might want to consider at some stage.

The Convener: I am aware that, because of the nature of the committee and the business load that it will have, there may be ways in which we can address those issues other than asking someone to come and speak to us about them. The committee may request briefings, or two or three members of the committee may be asked to go away as we discussed earlier.

Nicola Sturgeon: I would be happy to report on my involvement in those issues, if it would be helpful, and we could consider ways of taking them forward.

The Convener: That might be a way of making progress. We talked earlier about having small groups examining parts of the education bill; we might similarly ask several members to report back to the committee on such issues. We could obviously use Nicola's expertise as well. We will make a note of that and add it to the report that will be presented to the committee. Are there any other issues concerning children and young people?

Mr Macintosh: I quite like the broad headings. Is that how we are going to proceed? Is the agenda going to be the education bill, followed by other education issues—specifically wider curricular issues and the others that we talked about—and a section on children and young people?

The Convener: There will be many overlaps, which is why I am wary of saying that that is how we will proceed.

Mr Macintosh: We will have an hour and a half to discuss the education bill—is that the plan?

The Convener: In terms of practicality, that would be a good way forward, but we should retain some flexibility. That gives people an idea of what is on the agenda and what is coming up, so that they can decide their business accordingly.

Ian Jenkins: I wondered about that last item, and I mentioned it to Nicola just before she left the

room. Would we be a lead committee on the children's reporters thing, or would that fall to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee? There must be funny wee bits.

Gillian Baxendine: That clearly overlaps the remit of both committees.

Ian Jenkins: I am quite happy to discuss the matter. I am not trying to stop the discussion.

Fiona McLeod: If we discuss it and think that it is important, should we tell the Justice and Home Affairs Committee?

The Convener: Yes. That idea of the flow of information from one committee to another has been raised at the conveners committee. As we are all so busy, we do not want to carry out the same work twice. However, we may approach a certain issue from a different angle and we may want to share our information with somebody else.

We will move on to sport, which is what appears next on the agenda. The issues are: sport strategy; sportscotland; Hampden, which we have discussed; and drugs in sport. Are there any other issues that members have identified? No. We are in the process of organising a briefing with sportscotland. Is there anybody else whom members feel it would be useful to consult?

16:00

Mr Monteith: Given sportscotland's remit, and the fact that a great deal of work on soccer and rugby is done outwith sportscotland, it would be useful for the Scottish Football Association, the Scottish Premier League and the Scottish League to brief us. We could also ask to see the Scottish Rugby Union.

Fiona McLeod: There are many more organisations than sportscotland. I cannot remember them all, but the Scottish Association of Local Sports Councils and a few similar organisations often have a different point of view from that of sportscotland. It will be important to get a mix of opinions, particularly from grass-roots organisations.

The Convener: What might be useful is for us first to have a briefing from sportscotland on the issues that have been identified so far. We could then see which other organisations or individuals we want to ask for further information. You are right: there will be other organisations that we will want to invite at that stage. Finally, we move on to culture.

Fiona McLeod: I suggest that the integrated information strategy be taken out of the culture section. We might want to look at that separately. I asked a question on the strategy a week or so ago and was given the usual vague answer, but the

Executive did say that it would come to the Parliament with some thoughts on the strategy by the middle of the autumn. The feeling from the profession is that we must get a move on with that. The end of the year is looming and that would have been the time for Scotland to set off into the next information century. I suggest that this is not a cultural issue, but one that stands alone.

Mr Macintosh: I suggested earlier that we should look at the Scottish music business.

The Convener: I am sorry, I had forgotten that. I will include it.

Mr Monteith: Your list of business already includes the national theatre. The junior minister for culture has mentioned that that will be part of the debate on the national cultural strategy, so we should bring forward our discussion on that, rather than put it back.

The Convener: That was mentioned during the debate on the cultural strategy, so it might be something that members want to raise with the minister when she attends the committee.

Mr Stone: I would like to add cultural tourism. It impinges a little on other committees, but coming from the Highlands as I do, I am convinced—I do not want to use unparliamentary language—that we can fleece the Yanks and the rest of the world when they come to Scotland. One thing that I would be keen on is a Highland clearances centre with a database. That could be replicated in many parts of Scotland. We have a tremendous product, and I am not sure that the tourism and education worlds are focused on its potential. This connects to what Cathy was saying. We must recognise that we are not only Loch Ness monsters or hey Jimmys—we are more diverse than that.

Cathy Peattie: Not all Scottish music is performed by Moira Anderson. I would like us to do a wee bit better with Scottish music traditions. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Stone: Thank heavens.

The Convener: That is well said.

I am aware that, while we have had a number of cultural briefings, we have not talked to the libraries, Historic Scotland or the National Trust for Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon: The committee might have dealt with visits to community schools while I was out of the room—if so, interrupt me. We should arrange a limited programme of visits to a number of schools to get a first-hand view of the situation, not only in the community schools, but in rural and urban schools.

The Convener: We will end the meeting with a discussion on travel. You are right, Nicola: such visits would be helpful. We will include community

schools in the list of bodies from which we would like to take evidence.

Mr Stone: The tourist boards used to have an events and festivals budget. I seem to remember that those budgets were removed when Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise were shaken up. It might be advisable to talk to people from those bodies.

The Convener: That is true.

There are difficulties with the timing of our meetings. We are programmed to meet fortnightly on a Wednesday morning but, given the work load that we have been discussing, I appreciate that that will not be often enough. Our meeting at this time on a Tuesday would unfairly prevent one member from attending. I suggest that we arrange three slots for meetings—Tuesday morning, Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning—and rotate those times so that the same members will not always be missing. It will be important to ensure that agendas are circulated as early as possible, so that members can make informed decisions about whether they need to come to the additional meeting at the expense of another committee's meeting.

How do members feel about that arrangement?

Ian Jenkins: That sounds like the best that we can do.

Mr Macintosh: And we will have a regular additional meeting every week now?

The Convener: Yes. We will send round a schedule to give members an idea of when the meetings will be.

Our last item is travel. The issue was discussed at the conveners meeting, at which it was decided that there would be practical and financial difficulties—in terms of research, clerking and reporting staff—if all the committees decided that they wanted to travel out of Edinburgh at the same time. However, that should not stop us travelling round to discuss aspects of the bill and of education in general with people—we should still travel to community schools, for example.

Because of the financial implications, we will have to put to the conveners committee applications for any travelling that we decide we want to do. Committees will be expected to make a definite proposal that details their reasons for travelling, but I am sure that this committee can justify any travel on which it decides and will be clear about its programme.

I suggest that we examine community schools first and that we consider going to two or three to see different aspects of their work.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I suggest that, if we are going to make a visit, we should try

to make the best use of that time. If possible, we should consider other aspects of the committee's work. I suggest that we visit Burnfoot Community School in Hawick and take on some of the rugby issues in the Borders, where the introduction of professionalism is having an impact on young people and on the teaching and development of the game at local clubs.

We should examine some of the cultural issues in the Borders, too, such as the Historic Scotland and National Trust for Scotland properties that we could visit. We might combine the three aspects of the committee's remit in one visit, which would not be too time-consuming, nor too costly. I am sure that Ian would be delighted to go to the Borders.

Ian Jenkins: You are looking for my seat.

Karen Gillon: No.

The Convener: That is a useful suggestion. We should make the best use of any visits that we undertake. I have been warned against going to the Borders or the Highlands in December and January, but we will try to organise a visit as soon as possible.

Mr Stone: I assume that such trips are not meant to be done in the Westminster style, with pomp and ceremony and people wearing silver—I was going to say medals, but perhaps that would not have been a wise word. Could not we go in a minibus or something?

Fiona McLeod: Could not we take "the" bus?

Mr Stone: Is there only the one?

The Convener: We could take a bus from St Andrew Square or George Street, or wherever they stop these days. I assure members that the committee will not require any pomp and circumstance. We are all aware that we have a job to do, which is the reason for a visit if we go anywhere.

Gillian, do you need a formal declaration from us that we want to take that further?

Gillian Baxendine: No.

The Convener: The committee will have to agree to every visit, so that they can be put on the agenda.

Mr Macintosh: Do you want us to propose visits?

The Convener: If members have specific issues that we could address, it might be useful if they could pass them on to Gillian. Then we can list them and determine where there are overlaps. I take on board Karen's point about making the best use of visits.

The final item that I want to mention does not come under the heading of "Any other business"—

it is that we do not have "Any other business" on the agenda. That is part of the standing orders of the Parliament. We must always notify people of what is on the agenda—not just committee members, but members of the public and any interested bodies—so that they know what is coming up and will not be caught unawares if something is discussed that they did not know about. That is a practical issue, and I know that it causes problems for members if matters arise at short notice.

If something arises that committee members want to add to the agenda after the agenda has been circulated, I suggest that they speak to either myself or Gillian. We will try to notify members of the item, so that it can be dealt with, although that will not be under the formal heading of "Any other business". We are not trying to preclude discussion, and I am aware that there might be occasions when there is an emergency. However, the standing orders say that there shall not be "Any other business", either for committees or for the Parliament's meetings. Therefore, that heading will not appear on the agenda, although we will try our level best to include items that are suggested by members before the start of the committee.

16:15

Fiona McLeod: May I put an issue on the agenda for the next meeting?

The Convener: You can indeed.

Fiona McLeod: I would like members of the committee to consider signing up to the children's promise. As we are the children's committee of the Scottish Parliament, it would be appropriate to give our last hour's wages to children's charities.

The Convener: We should consider that and take a recommendation to our colleagues as well. That will be on the agenda for the next meeting. Members should pass on to the clerk any other items that arise. Thank you very much for your attendance.

Meeting closed at 16:16.

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