

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 9 November 1999
(*Morning*)

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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE 7th 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

WITNESS:

Rhona Brankin (Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport)

COMMITTEE CLERK:

Gillian Baxendine

ASSISTANT CLERK:

Alistair Fleming

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 9 November 1999

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:35*]

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order. Yesterday, there was an announcement on Scottish Opera, but to my knowledge, none of the committee members has been provided with a copy of it. The announcement is obviously germane to our questioning and it was recorded in last week's *Official Report* that we wanted to ask about the matter.

A statement has been made that has financial implications, and the Minister for Children and Education has not had the courtesy to copy it to us. That is immensely regrettable.

The Convener (Mrs Mary Mulligan): I am not sure that that is a point of order, but I am happy to ask that copies be circulated to members. The minister might refer to it when she is speaking.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): There has been tremendous speculation about tickets for the England v Scotland game. Can I clarify that we will be able to ask questions about that when we deal with the Hampden project later?

The Convener: When we reach the Hampden project on the agenda, you can raise that point.

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order. Is it in order, as this is the last meeting of the committee before the two Scotland v England games, for us to send our warmest best wishes to the Scotland team?

The Convener: Yes, but that is not a point of order. Can members please remember not to make points of order that are not points of order?

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): May I raise a genuine point of order?

The Convener: You may, if it is genuine.

Nicola Sturgeon: At an earlier meeting, you ruled that no item on the agenda would deal with any other competent business because all matters that we want to raise should be clearly noted on the agenda. If that is the case, when would it be appropriate to raise matters that did not come to light early enough to be placed on the agenda?

The Convener: I am loth to give a cut-off point.

The advice I gave was that, almost right up to the beginning of the meeting, members could notify me or the clerk about issues that had arisen and we would try to put them on the agenda.

There is no item on the agenda for any other competent business because we want people to know what will come up in the meeting.

Nicola Sturgeon: I understood that the reason for the ruling was that agendas had to be published. I do not see how that is consistent with a rule that says that items can be placed on the agenda up to the moment when the meeting starts. That would still prevent the public from being aware of what would come up at the meeting.

The Convener: I meant that members could notify me as late as a day before the meeting, not five minutes before.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is slightly different from what you said earlier, which suggested that, if matters arose that a member wanted to discuss, there would be no way to do so other than by a point of order.

The Convener: There is no agenda item called any other competent business. That is because items have to be advertised as being on the agenda. I try to be flexible and let members raise matters at the beginning of meetings. However, if something is not a point of order, please do not try to disguise it as one. If members have legitimate questions, I will take them.

I am trying to ensure that committee members can raise matters, but we know that we cannot put things on the agenda willy-nilly because we aim to be as open as possible.

Evidence

The Convener: We have with us this morning Rhona Brankin, the Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport. She will cover the two issues that the committee asked her to speak about: the national cultural strategy and the future of the national stadium, Hampden Park.

The Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport (Rhona Brankin): I welcome the opportunity to describe to the committee the progress that we have made on developing a national cultural strategy and to engage with members of the committee. We have a valuable opportunity this morning to have a two-way discussion about the national cultural strategy.

The national cultural strategy will deal with much more than the role and funding of the national companies. However, I recognise and welcome that members of the committee have decided to take a special interest in that aspect. I recognise

that events at Scottish Opera are relevant to our discussion today; Sam Galbraith gave a full account yesterday of the action that the Scottish Executive has taken to secure a stable future for Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet. I know that a copy of the answer was sent from the minister's office and I regret that it did not arrive. However, answers to parliamentary questions are available to the Parliament as a matter of course. If members have any questions, I will do my best to answer them. I will also be pleased to answer questions on the matters that I set out in yesterday's letter on Hampden.

I will set out the position on the cultural strategy briefly and then will answer questions. I look forward to hearing the views of the committee on how the cultural strategy process can be made as constructive and helpful as possible.

We launched the strategy on 10 August with the document, "Celebrating Scotland", which members will have seen and will be familiar with by now. Responses were asked for by the end of October, and we have had more than 200. It became clear, however, that some respondents will need a little more time; we have granted extensions to the deadline. Nevertheless, we would like to have comments by the middle of the month. By the end of November, it will be difficult to accommodate comments properly in the analysis of and report on the consultation.

We have set up a series of 12 public meetings. The first was held in Aberdeen on 29 September and the latest in Edinburgh last night. Audiences have ranged from 30 in Galashiels to an impressive 70 in Ullapool. The Scottish Executive is also investigating the feasibility of holding a consultation meeting for the Highlands and Islands using the videoconferencing network of the University of the Highlands and Islands. If that proves to be workable, we will publicise it widely in advance.

In addition to the public meetings, we have had the benefit of a meeting that was arranged by Glasgow City Council to gather the views of ethnic minority communities. A meeting to gather the views of children and young people is being organised by Glasgow City Council for the end of November. We felt strongly that we wanted to get views from as many people and age groups as possible.

Analysing and preparing a report on the responses will be a large task. We have engaged consultants, Bonnar Keenlyside, to assist with the work. That firm was recruited after a competitive tender in which six firms were invited to bid.

It is premature to speculate on the outcome of the consultation at this stage, but some key themes are emerging: the importance of education

and young people; the role that the arts and heritage can play in contributing to social inclusion and the rebuilding of communities; the links to sport and tourism; and the potential of the creative industries to enhance cultural and economic life in Scotland. I expect those themes to be followed up in the next stage of the strategy.

The focus group has met twice and is scheduled to meet again in early December. Members have been busy attending and chairing the public meetings. Three people outwith the focus group have chaired meetings for us. I am grateful to all the people who have given, and will give, generously of their time for this exercise.

09:45

As well as the broad generic themes that I identified, the strategy will need to define a place for the national companies. That will be a question not just of funding. We must also consider the concept of national companies, the areas of artistic activity that they cover and the role that it is right for them to play in the nation's cultural life. Of course, funding will be an important issue. I referred to the statement made by Sam Galbraith yesterday on Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet; we expect that the funding announced in that statement will provide an opportunity for the new joint company to plan a stable future.

It is also right to mention the place of the national institutions—the museums, galleries and libraries—and their relations with local museums and galleries, some of which, in Glasgow for example, operate on a large scale.

As members will be aware from the document "Celebrating Scotland", we also have regard to Scotland's unique built heritage. In addition, we are keeping in mind the important and close connection between the development of the cultural strategy and our separate initiative on architecture.

We have to give much attention at the moment to the national companies—that is understandable—but I want to assure the committee and the people of Scotland that that is not tunnel vision on the Executive's part. Our aim is to develop a broadly based policy for culture, within which creativity in all the art forms can flourish. One further reassurance that I want to give before I talk about football is that we will certainly not forget the traditional arts in Scotland—music, song and poetry—whether they are expressed in Gaelic or Scots. Our traditions are the essential fibres that we will all weave within the tapestry of Scotland's new millennium.

I undertook to give the committee a brief report on Hampden and on the strenuous efforts that have been made to resolve the financial problems

surrounding the national football stadium. The position is set out in the very full letter that I sent to the convener yesterday. Broad agreement was reached in mid-October on a rescue package to which the Scottish Executive would contribute £2 million, subject to certain terms and conditions. Much work was still needed, however, before the package could be signed, sealed and delivered. Considerable progress has been made in the past three weeks, but sensitive negotiations and discussions are still taking place.

I hope that the committee will understand that it would be improper for me to disclose details at this stage. Ministers do not want to prejudice or pre-empt the outcome of the current negotiations. We remain optimistic that a satisfactory solution to the present problems will be found shortly. A magnificent national football stadium has been built; we should not overlook that fact. What is needed now is to cap all the hard work by restoring confidence in the project. We want the people of Scotland to be justly proud of the national football stadium and the excellent facilities that have been provided there.

The Convener: Thank you. I remind members that the minister will be here until 11.30 am. I suggest, therefore, that we take the next hour to discuss the cultural issues, then at around 10.45 am, we will move on to the Hampden situation. That will be the easiest way to ensure that everyone can contribute. We will start with the cultural strategy. Members should indicate to me if they have questions or comments for the minister.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): On my way in this morning, I met a journalist who asked what we were going to talk about and what was important in Scotland. He thought that Hampden was the most important subject in Scotland today; I do not agree. I support and place great importance on the whole concept of traditional and folk music and recognise the value of the indigenous arts to Scotland. I suggested to Mike Russell earlier that we should give a couple of bursts of "Freedom Come All Ye"—given that Hamish Henderson's birthday is so near—but Mike reckoned that we would never be forgiven.

It is important that we have this opportunity to discuss our traditional arts, not least because of their economic value to tourism. It makes my blood boil when I visit tourist information centres, woollen mill shops and other such places and find that the music available there is of the heather and haggis, granny's Hieland hame variety. I cringe at that; people visit Scotland and enjoy traditional Scottish music, yet it is hard to find in the shops.

We must consider how the strategy values traditional music and how that music is resourced. Traditional music will continue only if our children learn about and appreciate it. Children in schools

and people in communities must have the opportunity to learn and to have that valuable music passed on to them. Resources must be available for schoolteachers and others, to help our young people to benefit from the music.

I do not know the content of the submissions, but I expect that they will emphasise the value of traditional music and the importance of providing resources for it.

Rhona Brankin: I welcome Cathy's comments. Traditional music and indigenous art forms are important to any Scottish cultural strategy. That point was made strongly at the meeting in Ullapool. More than 70 people attended that meeting and much discussion took place about, for example, access to tuition on traditional musical instruments. The national cultural strategy will have to address that issue. In my experience, there seems to be a fair amount of discrepancy in the delivery of instrumental tuition.

The Convener: I want to pick up on that point. The committee also has a remit on education, and we are all aware of the reduction in the amount of musical tuition in schools in recent years. How can we encourage schools to keep such tuition in the curriculum and children to take up the opportunities? School is not the only place where children get that opportunity, but often it is one of the most consistent sources of tuition.

Rhona Brankin: A research report—due to be published any day now by the Scottish Council for Research in Education—will examine instrumental tuition in schools. I understand that the report will point out wide discrepancies in provision by different local authorities, with which the responsibility lies. Some local authorities provide tuition free of charge, but others make a charge; that discrepancy needs to be addressed. Given that we are committed to increasing access to the arts, we cannot have a situation where access to such tuition is available only to families that can afford to pay for it. I will talk to Sam Galbraith and Peter Peacock about that. It is clear that the subject of young people and culture is represented strongly in the submissions.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I totally agree with that, and I am pleased to hear that Rhona Brankin will work with Sam Galbraith and Peter Peacock on that. Music gives lifelong advantages; I did maths and have forgotten it all, but what people learn about music lives with them for all time. If children learn to play instruments, they can join groups such as the local silver band; there is considerable community gain from individual learning.

Music and tuition must be at the heart of an inclusive cultural strategy. Drama is also important. We must get people to participate at an

early stage; that will have benefits for the local community and the whole country.

Ian Welsh (Ayr) (Lab): I have been working with a chap called Pete Heywood who edits a magazine called "The Living Tradition". We are trying to set up a traditional arts summer school or workshop in Ayrshire, but it has been quite difficult to put together the funding package to assist that process. We hope that the project would be self-sustaining in the longer term. Will the minister comment on whether enterprise companies have a role to play in such situations? At a previous meeting, I mentioned the creation of a cultural calendar, which in turn would contribute to an area's economic development pattern.

To reiterate what Ian Jenkins said, when I was involved in teaching in Auchinleck, the school had a successful and vibrant pipe band tradition that extended into the range of former mining communities in the area. However, taking part in that was an expensive hobby. Is there an argument for strengthening the funding regime for cultural pursuits in schools? Very often, such pursuits are the first to go when local authorities are strapped for cash. Will the minister comment on that?

Rhona Brankin: What has been suggested about the enterprise companies is important. Jamie Stone probably knows more than I do about the model in the Highlands and Islands, but I have been impressed by the partnership that has been forged there between Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Arts Council and the tourist board. That group of partners works together because the importance of culture to economic development is clearly recognised. We could look at that model and similar models in other parts of Scotland.

Perhaps—I suggest this to Ian Jenkins—we could consider such a partnership in the Borders. I recently attended a meeting in Galashiels, at which the strength and depth of feeling for our indigenous culture—and how passionately people wanted to be able to support that—was very clear. A cultural strategy officer has been appointed in the Borders.

Local enterprise companies have a clear role to play in the recognition of the importance of culture. Heavens, look at the importance of culture to Edinburgh, or to Glasgow, the city of architecture. Culture is terrifically important and local enterprise companies have a central role to play in local partnerships that will benefit the local economy.

Like Ian Jenkins, I have been involved in schools and various productions over the years. I think that we all recognise the importance to children's learning of access to music tuition and drama productions. Recent research has shown

that such access has an impact on children's levels of attainment. Music or drama should be not an optional extra, but an important part of the curriculum. Those subjects help to develop youngsters' self-esteem and self-confidence; that has a knock-on effect on their learning. We must consider how such tuition is funded. For example, Midlothian Council has a development officer for silver bands, and the bands work closely with the schools. We also have school sports co-ordinators; perhaps we should consider a similar way of getting some arts funding into schools. We can look at that.

I accept everything that has been said about the importance of giving youngsters access to music, the arts and drama.

The Convener: Thank you. Jamie Stone is next, then Fiona McLeod.

Michael Russell: I wanted to—

The Convener: Sorry, Mike. Did you want to come in on that point?

Michael Russell: I wanted to ask a separate question.

The Convener: I have a list of people who want to ask questions. Fiona McLeod and Jamie Stone were before you.

10:00

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I completely welcome what the Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport is saying, particularly on the link between music and other forms of education, about which there is now scientific evidence.

I should declare an interest at this stage. I am a director of the Highland festival.

The minister and Ian Jenkins are right. Music tuition is down to the charging policy, which is a sticky question. This matter crossed all political boundaries in Highland, where we had a huge argument about instrumental charging for the children's lessons. Although the matter lies in the hands of local authorities, it would be helpful if we could give them a steer. I knew of cases in which children dropped out of instrumental instruction because their parents simply could not afford it.

We have had a renaissance of music in the Highlands. I got free lessons when I was at Tain Royal Academy, although I learned how to play the fiddle only to avoid playing football, which is ironic given what we are about to discuss. There has been a complete change in the Highlands over the past 20 years. The involvement of local enterprise companies is a key—the minister may want to comment further on that. It is something that we can show to the rest of Scotland.

I want to change tack with my next point. We have a linguistic culture in the Highlands that varies hugely. In some cases, certain words and styles of speaking are beginning to disappear. May I push you on what your thoughts and those of your department are on trying to preserve and encourage that diversity of culture? If we do not act fairly quickly, some things will disappear, which would impoverish Scottish culture.

Rhona Brankin: The recognition of indigenous languages in Scotland is very important. Indeed, we are moving forward with Gaelic and Scots and are considering how we can ensure secure status for Gaelic.

The issue of Scots is interesting. There has been a reawakening of interest in the different forms of Scots language. There has been a recognition in education circles that we should be giving youngsters access to texts in Scots. There will be a requirement for a Scots text in the new higher still exam.

We expect to have a significant number of responses on those issues, which I welcome. The Scottish Executive recognises the unique positions of Gaelic and Scots under the European charter of minority languages. The charter has still to be signed, but work is on-going.

An issue that was raised with me at the Mòd was that of youngsters coming to school or nursery school with Gaelic or a dialect of Scots as their first language. It is important that those youngsters are given an opportunity to express themselves in their first language, just as it is for any child coming to school with English as their second language. That is something about which I need to talk with Sam Galbraith and Peter Peacock, as it has implications for teacher education.

Fiona McLeod: I do not want to fall out with Cathy Peattie but, as we are discussing popular cultural events, I have to tell her that I do not think that 17,000 people have all been trying to get opera tickets at 9.01 on a Friday morning.

Our conversation has developed around culture for young people within education and around what we see as the benefits of culture for young children. I am concerned about that—we should properly involve young people in consultation, not impose our ideas on them.

I want to pick up on what the minister said. At the end of November, Glasgow City Council will hold an event to gather the views of young people on the cultural strategy. That is only one event to speak to young people in the whole of Scotland. Rhona has told us that the consultation period finished at the end of October. She said that she would extend it to the middle of this month, but that contributions after that might be difficult to

incorporate in the analysis.

I raised this matter with Sam Galbraith in the chamber. When we talk about consulting young people, we must be serious. Consultation must not be an add-on. It must be part of every piece of legislation. We must go out and say to young people, "Be involved in the process."

Rhona Brankin: I absolutely agree. I have highlighted our need to consult young people. We are in discussion with Children in Scotland, whose members are also keen to communicate with young people. There is potential for innovative ways of doing that. If you have any suggestions, Fiona, they would be most welcome.

On consultation, the initial date by which submissions were to be in was the end of October. Various people said to us that they would have difficulty with that, so we now hope to receive everything by the end of November. If we find major gaps at that time, and if we are not satisfied that we have heard the views of young people, we will further seek those views. I can assure the committee that we believe that it is essential to listen to people. God knows, I have a 21-year-old and a 22-year-old, and they are not backwards in coming forward to tell me what they think about culture.

I welcome Fiona's comments. If she has any suggestions about innovative ways of carrying out consultation, that would be great.

Fiona McLeod: This came up in the committee's discussion with Sam Galbraith and Peter Peacock. It has now come up in this discussion with Rhona Brankin. On both occasions, it has been returned to me to see whether I have any suggestions. The committee has accepted that we will take this matter forward and we are doing so—I am now the rapporteur. However, we have not seen evidence that the Executive takes this matter seriously and considers young people a fundamental part of the consultation process.

Ian Jenkins: Under pressure from the media to get things done, we have made all the consultation periods for adults and young people too short. We expect people to respond quickly, not just in culture but across the board. People feel under pressure because of that. Members of a community council told me that they had not heard anything about the Arbuthnott report and not much about this, that or the other bill. That was partly because that would not have been possible, as the community council met only once a month. We talk about consultation a lot, but we are hurrying it too much—although I understand the reasons.

Karen Gillon: If we are asking local authorities for responses, there should be an expectation that, as part of their submissions to the

Government, they will contact or consult organisations or arrange for organisations such as youth services to consult young people. Local authorities and youth services are ideally placed to work with young people in the broadest sense, across all the divides.

We need to break down some of the stereotypes about young people in terms of culture and the arts and how we engage them in discussion. The publication of a document such as "Celebrating Scotland" is perhaps not the most useful way of engaging young people. We need to look at some of the marketing surrounding consultation; we must ensure that it attracts young people's contributions and does not just allow them to contribute without necessarily expecting them to do so. We need to expect contributions in such a way that young people from the widest spectrum of Scottish life will want to respond and will feel included, and not just through the youth parliament.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It strikes me that we should be hearing from the minister. There seem to be a lot of rambling questions—some of the contributions do not seem to contain questions. Could we have short, sharp questions, so that we can hear more of what the minister says, rather than what the members of the committee have to say?

Ian Welsh: You start.

Mr Monteith: I have indicated that I wanted to ask questions, but have not been introduced yet.

The Convener: Brian, we are also taking comments from committee members. It is important that members make their views known to the minister on the cultural strategy. However I appreciate what you are saying—it is always difficult to get everyone in. Rest assured that you will be after Mike Russell, who is next.

Michael Russell: I will not be as censorious as Brian Monteith; I will take my time.

Brian has pointed out one important thing that is germane to what I want to ask the minister. In the past 20 or 25 minutes of questioning, the minister has heard what she will have identified at the meetings that she has been holding—that culture is a matter of individual passion for and commitment to a range of things. Some of those things are shared. Cathy Peattie has been talking about traditional music. I have an interest in opera—which, with other matters, I want to come on to later. Jamie has an interest in Geri Halliwell and the Spice Girls. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Stone: Strike that from the record. *[Laughter.]*

Michael Russell: We all have our interests.

That, however, can become squashy and amorphous. I want to ask about strategy. You, minister, are responsible to the Parliament for producing the document. It is headed "A National Cultural Strategy". You have told us that there have been 200 replies and that you are hoping for more. That is encouraging. I have been asking the organisations that I have been speaking to—despite my reservations about this approach—to submit information and ask questions.

You have all that material. You will get more material. You have appointed consultants to analyse it. What happens next? Talk us through the process and the outcomes. Are we talking about legislation, or about reviews of existing bodies? It seems that you will accumulate a huge range of ideas and initiatives—and some criticism—from existing bodies, but the further I look into the crystal ball, the less clear I am about what you want to achieve as a minister in terms of setting a national cultural strategy.

Rhona Brankin: I hope that as many people as possible contribute to the process. I hope that you and your party will also contribute, Mr Russell. I welcome the fact that this committee is talking about the cultural strategy.

When we set up the Scottish Parliament, we said that committees would operate in a new way and would be involved in developing policy. That is why I welcome the opportunity to have this discussion. The Executive has to be able to draw up a programme of policy actions. I want the cultural strategy to take into account people's views—we will, I hope, receive a lot more than the 200 responses so far. Those views will encompass a range of things. I have already indicated some of the issues that will come through—a concern about young people in education and about indigenous culture.

Some issues that arise from the submissions will require the Government to do something. Let us consider instrumental tuition in schools. There is already an indication that we may have to examine that. I want, in reading the submissions, to be able to articulate a vision for Scotland. What does a healthy, cultural Scotland look like? What happens when culture is alive and well in Scotland? What sort of things will people be doing? We have to be able to set out the aims for a healthy, cultural Scotland. If we want to achieve that, we have to establish how to go about it and what steps the Government will take.

It is too early to say what those steps will be, but there will be implications for education and for how local enterprise companies work with cultural organisations in their area. There will also be implications for local authorities. We have to be clear about what a healthy, cultural Scotland looks like and then determine the necessary steps to be

taken over a period of years. We will need to set clear targets.

10:15

Michael Russell: A strategy is more than a set of action points—I think that you accept that. However, I am positive that you are talking about a vision of a Scotland that can be achieved, both the way in which we live in Scotland and the way in which we interface with it. That does not come without a price tag, nor does it come without some criticism of, or need to change, existing institutions. Will you legislate to change existing institutions if, in developing this strategy, you find that they need to be changed?

We have been through an enormous wish list—a term I do not like—or shopping list of cultural improvement and change in Scotland, which has a price tag. For example, instrumental instruction in schools is charged to parents because of local authorities' resource problems—such things cost money. I would be excited if the Executive is saying, first, that nothing is ruled out in terms of structural change and, secondly, that it accepts that there are insufficient resources and that this area will be resourced more fully. We will have to see whether that is actually what you are saying. Can you tantalise us with that prospect?

Rhona Brankin: I can tantalise you willingly, Mike—I can tantalise you any time.

We are looking for a vision for Scotland's cultural future. Members have heard about some of that vision today—people feel passionately about it. We need that vision.

Yes, we will be prepared to examine the steps that we will have to take in order to realise that vision and to examine existing institutions. We have to be able to make hard decisions, which we will not shy away from. On instrumental tuition, people have had to make hard decisions because, as you say, the pot of money is not unlimited. The cultural strategy examines both our vision for Scotland and how we go about realising it.

I am not ruling anything out. We are attempting to be creative and to involve as many people as possible in the process. I am more than delighted to hear your views on what we should be doing and I look forward to your submission.

Michael Russell: As you know, we had strong reservations but, as you have said that you are not ruling anything out, I take you at your word. We will submit information to you.

However, as the strategy develops, I hope that we will have the opportunity to reflect on the fact that almost every organisation—I suspect—will say to you that the resource base is inadequate, particularly with regard to local authority funding. I

am not criticising local authorities, which are themselves short of resources. However, local authority funding has not been replaced with private money as often as it should have been, which has led to a shortage of resources.

Mr Monteith: I am interested in the animated replies from the minister. We are getting closer to the heart of the matter. The vision of the minister becoming a Spice Girl for the arts in Scotland is most interesting—I am sure that Jamie would agree.

I want to talk about priorities and the strategy. Initially, we touched on traditional music, which is funded to the tune of about £250,000. A non-traditional form of music—Scottish Opera—was, before yesterday's announcement, funded to the tune of £6.1 million. Minister, do you see a place in the strategy—in the vision—for changing priorities? For example, one could say that, although Scottish Opera is important, greater priority should be given to supporting indigenous forms of music and art. The strategy may not lead to the removal of funding altogether from other, imported forms of high art but it could lead to greater priority being given to forms of Scottish art, which find it harder to gain private support.

Rhona Brankin: That could come through the strategy. I feel passionate about traditional Scottish music and art forms, and the submissions that we have received on the cultural strategy contain strong views on those issues, which we must consider.

I stress that we must not shy away from those issues. One of the beauties of the Scottish Parliament is that we have a chance to debate and discuss such issues and to decide our priorities.

Mr Monteith: I agree.

You talked about silver bands. Flute bands are a traditional form of music in areas such as Midlothian, East Lothian, West Lothian and through to Ayrshire—Ian Welsh will be familiar with them. Flute bands seem to have had some difficulty in attracting support from the Scottish Arts Council, although they are traditional in Scotland. What is your view on giving financial support to flute bands?

Rhona Brankin: I am pleased to say that the Scottish Arts Council exists as an arm's-length body from ministers—heaven help us if ministers made individual choices about funding, Brian. What would your choice be? It is up to the Scottish Arts Council to decide such issues.

Mr Monteith: As I am a Hibs supporter, I think that you might guess what I would choose.

Michael Russell: Dear oh dear.

Ian Welsh: I do not think that it is necessarily

our function to interrogate ministers all day. I am interested in pursuing Brian. Does he believe that Scottish Opera's money should be cut?

The Convener: Ian—

Ian Welsh: With respect, Mary, it is important that we receive clarification—

Mr Monteith: We are here to question the minister. I am quite happy to give my view publicly outside this committee.

The Convener: We could ask all members of the committee that question. However, over the next three weeks, when we are conducting our inquiry into the national companies, members' views on funding those companies will become plain. I will not ask Brian to answer that question now.

Mr Stone: May I ask a supplementary to Brian's question?

The Convener: You may, Jamie.

Mr Stone: Minister, Brian has touched on an interesting point. How will you package the word "culture"? If I were to mention culture at the Laigh sheep sales or in a queue for fish and chips, a lot of people would think that I was talking about blokes in tights prancing about on the stage. Culture is a loaded word.

Although I congratulate you on receiving 200 replies, that is not a huge amount, given the population of Scotland. How will you get people to take on board the fact that culture belongs to them, rather than to a lot of arty-farties?

Rhona Brankin: That is an important point. I accept that, in the past, too many people have associated culture with what are called the high arts. However, at consultation meetings, people have given strong views on what constitutes culture for them. For example, at the meeting in Galashiels, there was a heated debate about the role of sport in culture—rugby is an important part of the culture in the Borders. We do not want to say that the Government believes that this or that is the right culture—the strategy does not attempt to do that. This is an enabling strategy, which will allow Scotland to become culturally healthier. In no way does it prescribe the kind of culture that people should take part in.

That said, we need to be clear about the importance of protecting and developing our indigenous companies, for example. We will have to make choices in a context where funding is limited. As you say, Jamie, culture means many things to many different people—it often depends on the part of the country in which they live.

Nicola Sturgeon: I want to reiterate some of Mike Russell's concerns about where the strategy is going. The worry is that glossy documents will

be followed by consultants' reports, which will be followed by rather fine-sounding visions for the future of cultural life in Scotland. The stumbling block will come when the Executive is called on to take action in the form of either legislation or resources.

Rhona, you mentioned instrumental tuition in schools a number of times this morning—when a minister mentions something several times, that always gives rise to the suspicion that an Executive announcement is on the horizon. You know as well as any of us that instrumental tuition is a matter of local authority resources. I am not sure that any of your answers have done much to convince us that you, as the minister, have a clear idea of where the strategy is taking us. I hope to hear more concrete proposals from you before the end of the meeting.

I want to turn your attention briefly to the role of ethnic communities in Scotland in the consultation process and in the strategy that will emerge from that process. We have talked about Scotland's indigenous culture, but it is often the case that the distinctive cultures of ethnic communities, which add a great deal to our cultural life, are overlooked. Those communities should be a part of the national strategy, and that strategy should ensure that that happens.

In your opening remarks, you said that Glasgow City Council was facilitating a group to consult ethnic communities. My concern about that is similar to Fiona's concern about consultation with young people—that it is a token gesture rather than a real attempt to involve people in the consultation process. What response has there been from ethnic communities in the public meetings that have been held so far? Have they been attending those meetings? Have they actively participated? What further steps will be taken to ensure that their distinctive cultures will be fully involved in the strategy as it develops?

Rhona Brankin: When we talk about culture, we should talk about more than just money. We need to get away from harking back to resources all the time. There are many imaginative and innovative examples of the promotion of culture in Scotland, of which not all require money. For example, I have already talked about the involvement of Highlands and Islands Enterprise with the Arts Council and the local tourist board.

We need to consult minority ethnic communities. We recognise that Scotland is a multicultural society and the document welcomes the diversity of Scottish culture. We have involved ethnic communities in several public meetings. For example, in Aberdeen and Glasgow, the local authorities helpfully contacted ethnic minority groups on our behalf.

We are committed to consultation with those groups. At the end of the consultation period, if we do not believe that there have been enough submissions from ethnic minority groups, we will approach them to ask for their views. I assure you, Nicola, that I welcome your concern in this area. We must take on board the views of all groups in Scotland. If, at the end of the consultation period, we are unhappy about the input from ethnic minority groups, we will go out and contact them specifically to ask for their views.

Nicola Sturgeon: I welcome your comments about the ethnic communities.

I have not suggested that these issues are all about money. However, I have suggested that resources are central in some areas, including instrumental tuition, which you mentioned several times this morning. The problem for local authorities has been the lack of resources. As you are the minister responsible, we are looking for a clear indication from you that, if hard decisions have to be taken, you will be prepared to press for resources in the Executive and that the Executive will be prepared to follow through.

Mr Stone: I must correct Nicola. When I was vice-chairman of finance in Highland Council, we had a bitter argument about charging children for instrumental instruction. It is not always the case that that argument is about resources—it is about policy and imagination. In order to get rid of the charges, I used the argument—which I still use—that instrumental instruction does not cost too much after the cost of administering the system and so on is removed. I must pick you up on that point, Nicola. You may be right in some of the cases, but you are not always right in the case of instrumental instruction. If the minister is working towards a ministerial statement on that subject, I will welcome it with open arms. I think that you should, too, Nicola. We should not be churlish about it. Let us hope that the charges go.

Nicola Sturgeon: I would welcome such a statement but it is important that we hear more than rhetoric.

Mr Stone: With respect, Nicola, that is not rhetoric. It is not always about money. I can show you books and accounts that would prove that.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am here to hear the minister's views.

Rhona Brankin: I do not know how often I have to repeat that this is a genuine consultation exercise, out of which many issues will arise—some have done so already. We must consider how to address them and we will not shy away from them. If there are resource issues, we will consider them. We must make hard decisions about how much we are prepared to spend on culture in Scotland. That is what politics is all

about.

The Convener: I am anxious that we should move on because of the time. I will bring in Karen, and then Mike Russell.

Karen Gillon: You mentioned sport earlier. You will recall that a debate in the chamber showed the importance that MSPs placed on sport. What sort of responses have you received about sport's role in culture? For example, sport is a very important aspect of culture in the Borders and the Highlands, and, in central Scotland, football plays a strong role in local identity and culture.

10:30

Rhona Brankin: When we set out the consultation on the cultural strategy, we were aware that the Scottish Sports Council had already undertaken a two or three-year consultation on developing the Sport 21 strategy, which every party and, indeed the Executive, recognised as a far-reaching vision for Scotland's sport.

No one will deny that sport is a very important part of Scotland's culture. I am happy to look at any submissions about the importance of sport in the cultural strategy, as culture in its widest sense can incorporate sport. However, as a clear strategy for sport has already been set out, with established targets, I do not want to reopen a consultation that has gone on for years and has received much recognition. We need to knit sport and culture together to provide an all-encompassing approach to Scottish life.

The Convener: I know that members want to ask questions about Scottish Opera. The committee is about to launch an inquiry into national companies, including Scottish Opera, and we will be discussing how to pursue that issue. This morning, I received a copy of Mr Galbraith's written answer to Malcolm Chisholm's question. I hope that other members have also received the text of the answer, although I see that a few members are shaking their heads. It might have been useful for committee members to have seen this written answer yesterday to give them time to digest it before speaking to you. Committee members should be given such information as soon as it becomes available.

Michael Russell: Thank you for your support on the matter of providing information to the committee, convener. It would have been much better to reflect on the answer itself rather than to rely on press reports.

The national cultural strategy document refers twice to national performing companies. We will be exploring people's concerns about those companies. Although I lodged five written questions on this issue, none of them was

selected to be answered by Mr Galbraith in his written answer, which was publicised. How has the situation arisen at Scottish Opera? What was the reasoning behind providing money to bail out Scottish Opera for the third time in almost as many years? Many of us are concerned that, although the money has been granted, the reason for doing so is three months away. The public in Scotland need to understand how such a situation has arisen.

Rhona Brankin: Mike, I am quite surprised that you have not welcomed yesterday's announcement about putting £2.1 million into the board of Scottish Opera. The board of Scottish Opera was due to meet on Wednesday and was at the stage at which it might have ceased to trade. We are not prepared to play politics with the more than 200 jobs at Scottish Opera. The Government has moved swiftly, and I hope that we get some recognition for doing so.

Scottish Opera has been given this money for a year. The new chair will have three months to formulate plans about securing funding for the company. We are concerned to keep the company afloat at this stage. That should not pre-empt any committee inquiry into the role of national companies in Scotland and their funding. We put £2.1 million into Scottish Opera because we were not prepared to see the company go down the tubes.

Michael Russell: Thank you for confirming something that has not been confirmed before, that Scottish Opera was at a critical stage and would have gone down next Wednesday. Those were your words. I find it incredible that a company in such a situation should have announced last week its intention to put on the Ring cycle—the operatic equivalent of putting a man on the moon—when it knew it was days away from bankruptcy. That says something extraordinary about the running of the company.

However, let us put that to one side. You have not answered my question, minister. I asked whether you would give the committee an account of how such a situation arose, rather than telling us about its outcome. Will you answer that question now?

Rhona Brankin: No, I am not able to give you such an account. I can tell you only what happened when we discovered this situation. Sam Galbraith has asked for a full report on how the situation arose and what the company intends to do about it. However, we do not have that full report yet. I can report back to the committee when we have that information.

This situation happened only recently. The Arts Council officially informed us at the beginning of October of the difficulties experienced by the new

chief executive, Adrian Trickey, since his appointment at the beginning of September. We have had many meetings with the Arts Council and have resolved the situation by injecting cash into Scottish Opera to prevent the company from becoming insolvent. We have asked for a full report from Scottish Opera and the Arts Council to ensure that the situation does not happen again. I hope that the committee will welcome that.

Michael Russell: I would welcome Scottish Opera continuing to exist—

Rhona Brankin: Good.

Michael Russell: However, you are actually saying that you have put £2.1 million of taxpayers' money into an organisation that might have some kind of financial vortex into which the money might be sucked. You might have to put in another £2.1 million next week.

Is it responsible for a department to put money into an organisation without knowing the cause of the problem? On the other hand, if you know the cause of the problem, why will you not tell the committee and the public in Scotland, to whom the money belongs? It is either one way or the other. Either you do not know the cause of the problem, in which case it is irresponsible to put the money in at this stage; or you do know, and for some reason will not tell a committee of the Scottish Parliament.

Rhona Brankin: Let me repeat that we have asked for a report on how the company has come to be in this financial situation. We have put the money into the new joint board for Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet to prevent Scottish Opera from becoming insolvent. The money will allow the company to operate for this year and is not a long-term guarantee about what will happen in future.

We welcome the committee's forthcoming inquiry into the role of the national companies and their long-term funding. I look forward to hearing the committee's deliberations on Scottish Opera. I do not apologise for what we have done and I am glad that you welcome the fact that we have prevented Scottish Opera's insolvency.

Michael Russell: I hope that you will encourage companies to give more information to the committee than you have given.

Cathy Peattie: Minister, the steps that you have taken are important, as jobs are at risk. When I suggested last week that we examine national companies, I imagined that we would begin by discussing Scottish Opera now. We need a wider picture. We need to ask the Arts Council, Scottish Opera and the other companies the kinds of questions that Mike has just asked. However, the Government's interim measure was necessary to prevent Scottish Opera from going to the wall.

Rhona Brankin: Thank you, Cathy. Nobody wants to see Scottish Opera going to the wall.

Mr Monteith: Your answer to Mike's question about when you were first aware of Scottish Opera's difficulties is very interesting. You said that it was in early October. You have also explained that Scottish Opera was in danger of going into receivership. Do we have any information about what form of financial crisis Scottish Opera was in? Was the company in debt that was supported by an overdraft, or was the crisis caused by unpaid creditors? Before an organisation is bailed out in this way, it is important to know what kind of financial predicament it is in.

Furthermore, you said that the board might have called in the receivers next Wednesday. Given that the company had to have made some decisions—such as staging its critically acclaimed "Macbeth" at the Edinburgh International Festival in August—sometime before, is not it possible that Scottish Opera might have been trading illegally for a considerable time? In that case, there is a danger that the members of the current board could be struck off. To what extent are you satisfied that Scottish Opera's difficulties have happened only recently?

Rhona Brankin: We will be looking for such details in Scottish Opera's report.

At the end of September, I had an informal meeting with Magnus Linklater at which he told me that there were problems ahead. At the beginning of October, the Arts Council informed us of major problems. Since then, we have had regular meetings with the Arts Council and Scottish Opera.

Adrian Trickey, the interim chief executive of the company, made an assessment of the joint company's financial plans and of the current financial position of the constituent companies—Scottish Ballet and Scottish Opera—which retain their separate identities pending the creation of a joint board. On 29 September, Mr Trickey informed the Arts Council that the accounting deficit on 31 March would be £2.5 million and that there would be a cash deficit in the current financial year of £3.3 million, which would substantially exceed the company's overdraft facility. That information is available in the written answer. It became apparent very quickly that something had to be done. The figure of £2.1 million is some way short of the £2.5 million that the company requires, and we expect Scottish Opera to consider further overdraft facilities and other cost savings.

Mr Monteith: From which part of the Scottish Executive's budget will the £2.1 million come?

Furthermore, this session is part of the

discussion of a national cultural strategy and the committee will later be considering the possibility of a national theatre company. Given that the Arts Council already funds eight theatre companies to the tune of £2.6 million a year, are you concerned that we could have a national theatre company for less than the money being used to bail out Scottish Opera? Could the budget also provide funds for such a national company?

Rhona Brankin: I know that you feel very strongly about a national theatre, Brian, and I will happily consider the issue on the basis of the submissions that I receive. The theatre world is divided on the issue. However, a national theatre does not necessarily have to be a bricks-and-mortar concept. I have had informal discussions with Kenny Ireland, the artistic director of the Royal Lyceum Theatre Company, about that. I have asked him to put in a submission on the cultural strategy.

Regarding the broader issue of the national theatre—we will see what comes in and we will have that debate. The Executive is keen to ensure that theatre in Scotland is healthy and we have increased the amount of money that is available to the Scottish Arts Council for theatre.

The £2.1 million for Scottish Opera is the result of foreseeable end-year flexibility savings in the education budget.

10:45

The Convener: I remind you, Brian, that the remit for the inquiry is on our agenda. If the committee agrees, I hope that we will examine the proposals for a national theatre.

Michael Russell: This morning, we have found out a number of things that we did not know, but it is a pity that we did not know them before. One of those things is the alarming imminent bankruptcy of Scottish Opera. We have also found out the breathtaking true scale of their financial problems.

In her letter about Hampden the minister says that the consortium of organisations that put in £4.4 million attached two main conditions to their providing a further financial contribution. Those were that a new management structure for the operation of the stadium was to be put in place and that the co-funders were to be satisfied that there was a fully developed business plan. The Government wanted stringent conditions attached to Hampden. Why is it that all it wants for the £2.1 million it is to give to Scottish Opera is a report in three months' time?

Rhona Brankin: That is not true.

Michael Russell: It is true.

Rhona Brankin: Listen to what I am going to tell

you. I have already said that the £2.1 million is going to the new joint reconstituted board of Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet. Yesterday, we announced the appointment of a new chair of that board. There will now be the process of appointing a new board. The money will go to that new board. We expect to have a plan back from that board within three months. That plan must set out how the new board of Scottish Opera intends to take the company forward and make it financially sound.

Michael Russell: Why are you not passionate to know why this money has disappeared? Why, as a steward of public finance, will not you push this issue? You appear keen, in fact, to simply move on.

Rhona Brankin: Absolutely not. The Executive is keen to find out what is happening.

Michael Russell: What has happened?

Rhona Brankin: I am insisting that we get a full report from the Arts Council and from Scottish Opera. There will be information available on that report when we get it. I am as keen as anyone else to find out what went wrong at Scottish Opera, but I am also keen to find a way forward. That is exactly what we have done.

Michael Russell: There seems to be an astonishing discrepancy between the Government's approach to Hampden and its approach to Scottish Opera.

The Convener: Minister, you have referred on a number of occasions to the appointment yesterday of a new chair. Will you comment on that and tell the committee when the new chair will take up the post?

Rhona Brankin: Yesterday, we appointed Duncan McGhie, who is currently a partner with PricewaterhouseCoopers, as chair of the new joint company. He has a lifelong interest in music and has been a Scottish Opera season ticket holder. I understand that Mr McGhie will be joining the company as soon as possible.

We are keen to move forward. Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet have been in the process of merging over the past couple of years. The new chair of the new joint board will appoint members of that board. The board will then make decisions in consultation with the Arts Council about the future of Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet.

The Convener: How will those board members be appointed?

Rhona Brankin: The chair of the new merged company's board, in consultation with the Scottish Arts Council, will appoint members.

The Convener: When can we expect that process to be completed?

Rhona Brankin: I cannot give you any indication of when that will be, but I will be pushing for it. Sam Galbraith has said that the process must be concluded as soon as possible so that we can move quickly to the next stage.

The Convener: The committee would appreciate being kept informed about all developments relating to that.

Rhona Brankin: Absolutely. I will furnish the committee with a time scale.

Michael Russell: In view of the sums involved, surely the Nolan rules should apply.

Mr Stone: Mike Russell was quite right to bring this subject up and, in fairness, the minister has responded frankly. None of us would argue with the offer of a lifeline to Scottish Opera.

This committee should put out the message that those who presided over that shambles should fall on their swords if they have not already done so. We should also signal that it is entirely unacceptable to the Parliament that any of the personnel responsible remain in place. I expect to see a completely new board. There must be a clean sweep.

Rhona Brankin: With the appointment of the new chair of the new joint board we have a chance to appoint, in consultation with the Scottish Arts Council, a fresh board that will take a fresh look at the future.

Mr Stone: I suggest Mike Russell.

Mr Monteith: The minister mentioned that the funding is for the new joint board. A report in *The Herald* today states that the deficit for the joint company is in the region of £3.3 million, whereas the Scottish Opera deficit is £2.5 million. Is the minister saying that £2.1 million will go towards a projected deficit of £3.3 million?

Rhona Brankin: The £2.1 million is going to the joint board. I am sorry that members do not have the figures in front of them—they were made available to Parliament yesterday afternoon—but those that we have indicate a cash deficit in the current financial year of £3.3 million for the joint company. It is important that that £2.1 million is going to the joint company.

Mr Monteith: For the minister's benefit, I would like to suggest that when information is sent to us, it should also be sent to the parties' business managers, as they are particularly effective in ensuring that we definitely get important information.

The Convener: Obviously, we want members to get information as soon as it becomes available. Anything that can assist in that process will be useful.

We will move on to discuss Hampden. I am conscious that there may be issues relating to cultural strategy that we have not yet raised. We will come back to those issues when we have discussed the Hampden situation.

Fiona McLeod: I would like to make a point of order. The letter from Rhona Brankin dated 8 November says that Sam Galbraith wrote to Mary Mulligan on 19 September and 14 October. Committee members received a copy of a letter from Sam Galbraith to you, Mary, dated 14 September. We have a copy of one letter that was not mentioned in the letter from Rhona. Were two letters received? When was the second letter received and why were not copies circulated to members?

The Convener: My understanding is that there were two letters and that both were circulated to members. I have a copy of the second one, which I will find, but the general procedure is that if a letter comes to me, it is copied to the committee. I am not sure why that did not happen. Perhaps Gillian will comment on that. Did it come through your office, Gillian?

Gillian Baxendine (Committee Clerk): I am not sure what has happened regarding the second letter. I am checking that out.

Fiona McLeod: The committee must take this very seriously. Were two letters sent? When were they sent? Why is there a discrepancy regarding dates? The letter from Ms Brankin is dated 8 November. It is 9 November and we still do not have a copy of the missing letter.

The Convener: That is because we did not know that members did not have a copy. I assumed that if members had copies of the first letter, they would receive copies of the second letter. I have a copy of that letter here that I will be happy to circulate.

Fiona McLeod: A committee cannot be run on the basis of assumptions. We must set up clear organisational structures.

The Convener: As I said, I ask the minister to circulate any letters to all committee members. I was not aware that it was down to me to photocopy letters for members of this committee. That is done elsewhere. I will make sure that there are procedures to ensure that that happens.

The minister made reference to Hampden so we will move on to questions on that.

Karen Gillon: I would like to deal with the issue of ticketing. I understand that the minister is lucky enough to be going to the Scotland v England game next Saturday—I hope that that ticket was obtained legitimately. I spent a great deal of time a week past Friday trying to secure a ticket and I share the concerns, frustrations and

disappointments of the many Scots who thought that they were playing on a level playing field for a specified number of tickets. They were not. I have a number of concerns that this committee should look at. There are a number of people that we should contact, particularly the Scottish Football Association.

We must ask why things were done as they were and what course of action is being taken to remedy the situation. We need to ask questions of the SFA regarding how the tendering was done, and we must ask what action will be taken to ensure that a similar fiasco does not take place in future. Ordinary fans go to watch Scotland year in, year out in games that have little or no value to commercial sponsors, but for which the fans pay a great deal of money. We must ensure that they are not excluded from buying tickets for big games.

What role, if any, has the Scottish Executive played? Has it spoken to the SFA regarding tickets? It is a matter of considerable concern to ordinary fans, to this committee and to the Parliament that the matter has become a national disaster.

Rhona Brankin: The Executive recognises that this has caused great concern among fans and we very much regret that. I would welcome this committee contacting the SFA about the matter. Sam Galbraith has spoken with David Taylor, the chief executive of the SFA, and has asked that he report fully on what happened the next time that we meet him.

Karen Gillon: Could that report be copied to the committee for information so that we know what discussions have taken place between the Executive and the SFA? I seek guidance on when I should formally move that the committee write in the strongest possible terms to the SFA.

Rhona Brankin: It is legitimate that the committee should ask for that report. I am quite happy to have that on the record.

Fiona McLeod: If Mr Galbraith has had discussions with the SFA, why has this committee not been told about those discussions? That would have informed our discussions today. Is the Scottish Executive again not going to disclose information?

Rhona Brankin: No, Fiona. Let me repeat that Sam Galbraith has indicated to Mr Taylor that there is concern about this and he has asked for a report to ensure that this sort of thing does not happen in future. When we get that information, we will share with the committee whatever we are able to share. I am happy to do that.

Fiona McLeod: Whatever you are able to share?

Rhona Brankin: We will share with the committee the information that comes back to us from the SFA. The committee has agreed to ask the SFA for a full report, and I welcome that.

Mr Monteith: For reasons that will become apparent, I wanted to ask this question towards the end of the minister's contribution. Has she, Peter Peacock or Sam Galbraith enjoyed being a spectator at Scotland matches—or any other matches, for that matter—as a guest of the SFA? Have they attended any opera as guests of Scottish Opera?

Rhona Brankin: I can let you have that detailed information if you require it. I cannot give it to you off the top of my head.

Mr Monteith: Can you talk for yourself?

Rhona Brankin: Yes, I can talk for myself. I attended the cup final this year, in my role as Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport. I have attended a performance of Scottish Opera as a guest of that company. I may have attended more than one performance—I will check my files—and I would be happy to provide that information.

Mr Monteith: I am not trying to catch the minister out, but whether the minister can speak on these matters, having received some hospitality from those organisations, must be in question. I point that out not because I feel that she should not be allowed to speak, but because if we were to accept that hospitality, we might not be able to speak on these matters. Those points must be clarified.

11:00

The Convener: Are you questioning the minister's speaking at this meeting?

Mr Monteith: No, I am trying to point out the difficulties that this Parliament may face. It may become snarled up if ministers and other members receive hospitality from the likes of the Scottish Football Association and Scottish Opera to the point at which this Parliament becomes unworkable.

The Convener: So you are raising the point in the wider context, as an issue that must be addressed elsewhere?

Mr Monteith: Yes.

The Convener: Fine. Okay.

Mr Monteith: I shall touch on the matter of confidentiality. Given that Hampden is not in competition with another stadium, particularly, to what extent do you feel that client confidentiality—commercial confidentiality—limits you in giving us information from the consultant's report that was commissioned by the five core members?

Rhona Brankin: Commercially confidential information has been given to the Scottish Executive in the course of our discussions to resolve the problem at Hampden. It is not for the Scottish Executive to disclose such information without permission, nor would that be helpful in reaching a satisfactory solution to the present problems. If the Scottish Executive cannot be trusted to keep commercially sensitive information confidential, no one will want to share such information with the Executive in the future. I am sure that that is not what the committee wants.

The letter that you have received sets out as much as we are able to say at this stage. I very much hope that the committee welcomes the hard work that has gone into seeking a solution to the problem at Hampden. My senior civil servant in the sports policy unit has spent 75 per cent of his time, in recent weeks, in meeting after meeting, trying to resolve a difficult situation. We have given you as much information as possible at this stage, and we are hopeful that a satisfactory conclusion may be reached in the next couple of weeks.

Mr Monteith: I thank you for your answer. My concern is to try to define what could be commercially confidential when we are talking of more than £40 million of public money, and to what extent we should be taken into a similar confidence—even if it were done in private—to establish that everything is above board and there are no irregularities.

Michael Russell: Although the default in standing orders is to hold meetings in public, has the committee—or the convener, or the clerk—considered requesting the Executive to hold a private briefing for the committee on this and other matters? Again and again, the committee seems to be grounded on the rock of not being in a position to be told anything because matters are confidential.

I am sure that the committee would be sensitive and sympathetic to an approach from the Executive—and I hope that the Executive would be sympathetic to an approach from the committee—to receive information, to which we believe we are entitled, so as to take an overview of this matter, even if that meeting, or part of it, had to be held in private.

Rhona Brankin: I have not yet considered that option, Mike. If that is a suggestion that the committee wants to make, we could consider it.

Michael Russell: Would the Executive be willing to do so?

Rhona Brankin: I am concerned that we should not do anything to prejudice or damage the difficult, on-going negotiations. I hope that you will bear with me and support the Executive in the work that we are doing. There is no attempt to

keep information away from the committee. As soon as we have a deal on this, we will provide you with as much information as possible. I hope that you will recognise the difficulty and delicacy of the negotiations that have been going on.

Mr Monteith: If I can finish my question—

Michael Russell: Is that a no?

The Convener: Mike, will you let Brian finish his question?

Mr Monteith: It is clear that we have shown some patience in dealing with this matter; it is no surprise that Mike's patience is beginning to burst. There may be a point in having commercial confidentiality, but does the minister accept that once the deal has been done, there may be a case for her showing us what has happened?

Rhona Brankin: Once the deal has been done, we will look to share as much information as possible with the committee. Again I ask the committee to be supportive in what have been very difficult negotiations. This issue involves private companies and contractors, a degree of competition with other sports stadiums and commercially confidential information that I am not at liberty to divulge, because doing so would prejudice any agreement. We are looking for a positive outcome in the agreement. In Hampden we have a wonderful new national stadium, and nobody wants it to be closed. I hope that the committee recognises the work that has been done and the reasons for what I am saying.

Michael Russell: Is that a no? If the committee requested a private meeting to be briefed on this matter by you and your officials, would you not agree to that?

The Convener: The committee has not asked for that yet. It is difficult for ministers to answer hypothetical questions.

Michael Russell: With the greatest of respect, convener, I would like the minister to answer the questions we put to her.

The Convener: It is difficult for ministers to answer questions about requests that are not being made by the committee at this stage. Can we ask questions that we can have answered now? If, at the end of the presentation, the committee feels that it still does not have the necessary information, I will be happy to take forward Mike's suggestion.

Michael Russell: I am very surprised that I am not allowed to get an answer to a question that I have put in the committee.

The Convener: Mike, you know what answer the minister will give to that question, because we have had it before. We are trying to get as much information as we can at this stage. If, after we

have done that, you feel that you want additional information and that one way of getting it would be to hold a meeting, we can ask the minister to attend a meeting that will be held in private.

Michael Russell: Convener, I am not inclined to dispute a ruling from the chair. I must say, however, that I find that ruling surprising, given the role of this committee and the difficulty we have had getting an answer from the minister, who is being let off the hook.

The Convener: We will try to get the information, but if you are still not satisfied at the end I will come back to you.

Michael Russell: In my view, the minister is, unfortunately, being let off the hook on this matter.

Nicola Sturgeon: Before the end of this meeting, I would like the minister to indicate whether she is prepared to agree to a private briefing from her and her officials if, after we have heard her answers today, it is the view of this committee that it requires one. I do not think that that is asking too much of a minister who has been called before this committee to account for the situation regarding Hampden.

I have one or two questions to put to the minister, but before I ask them, I would like to say how much I regret the tone of the letter she sent to this committee yesterday. I am sure that she will agree that the situation regarding Hampden is a matter of great public interest and great public importance—first because of the sporting significance of our national football stadium and, secondly, because significant sums of public money are involved in the project. She also knows that, over a period of weeks, there have been various unsuccessful attempts to elicit information from the Executive, both by this committee and by my colleague, Fiona McLeod.

In the minister's letter, there is an implication that she resents being asked for information, a suggestion that by providing information she would somehow be doing this committee a favour, and a clear suggestion that this committee should be prepared to take at face value the Executive's assurances—notwithstanding the fact that, almost weekly, we read in the newspapers reports that contain information that this committee has repeatedly been denied. I do not think that that is a satisfactory way for a minister to treat a committee, and I hope that her answers this morning will go some way towards rectifying that.

I have heard the minister's comments about commercial confidentiality. I hope that she will indicate later whether she is prepared to agree to a private briefing. I must say that I have heard nothing from her this morning that would stop her giving clear answers to questions about how the problems at Hampden arose and their full extent.

Both matters should be clear from the interim consultants' report. I can think of no reason of commercial confidentiality that should prevent the minister providing us with those answers, and I ask her again to do so this morning.

My second question relates to the rescue package. This morning, I would like the minister to give us more details about that, and particularly the £4.4 million. That is covered in some detail in the letter, which also lists the bodies from which the money will come. Is the minister aware of the fact that City of Glasgow Council, for example, has not agreed to provide a grant to deal with this situation and at the moment is considering whether any contribution that it makes should be by way of a loan, rather than a grant? It would seem that even the information in the letter is not up to date and accurate.

This morning, we require some clear information from the minister—clear answers to very straightforward questions. The Executive should stop trying to hide behind the cloak of commercial confidentiality. The committee has a duty to the Scottish public and certain members of the committee are determined to carry out that duty, even if ministers would prefer us not to.

Rhona Brankin: I understand that the letter I sent yesterday is already in the hands of the media, and I am very concerned about that. That underlines how cautious we have to be about issues to do with commercial confidentiality and about committing ministers to private briefings.

I repeat that we are at a very sensitive and difficult stage in negotiations about Hampden. I recognise Nicola's concern about Hampden, as I share it. I am sure that we all share her concern and want to see a resolution of the difficulties regarding Hampden.

I cannot comment on what Nicola has said about the letter. My information is that, of the £4.4 million rescue package, the Scottish Executive is contributing £2 million, the Millennium Commission £1.2 million, Glasgow Development Agency and sportscotland £500,000 each, and City of Glasgow Council £200,000. The package is subject to our receiving assurances about the future management of the project and to a viable business plan being adopted for the stadium. In due course, Sam Galbraith will make a full statement to the Parliament.

As I have already said, I hope that the committee recognises the difficulty of the negotiations that have been taking place. We are not trying to keep information from this committee and the Parliament; we are seeking a solution to the problem.

Nicola Sturgeon: I would like to ask two quick supplementaries. It is my clear understanding and

information that a meeting of a committee of the City of Glasgow Council decided last week not to agree to make a contribution, but to take the matter away and consider whether any contribution should be made by way of a loan. I would have thought that the minister should be in receipt of that information and been able to pass it on to the committee.

My second question takes us back to the point about commercial confidentiality. Let us assume that the negotiations are sensitive and that the minister feels that aspects of them are confidential; I still cannot for the life of me understand how an explanation of how this problem arose in the first place is confidential. Under the terms of the consultants' remit, the answer to that question should be in their report. What is preventing the minister from making that information available? It is astounding that that basic information cannot be provided.

Rhona Brankin: I do not know whether you want me to keep repeating myself, convener. I have explained that the basis—

Nicola Sturgeon: We would like you to give us some answers.

Rhona Brankin: I have explained that the nature of the discussions that are taking place at the moment is such that it is not possible to disclose commercially confidential information—

Nicola Sturgeon: So you stifle information.

Rhona Brankin: I hope that the committee will accept and endorse what I am saying.

Nicola Sturgeon: No.

Rhona Brankin: A full statement will be made to the Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Convener: Will you clarify as soon as possible the discrepancy that there seems to be with regard to City of Glasgow Council, so that the committee is given the correct facts?

Rhona Brankin: Yes. My understanding is that the council committee considered the proposal for the money to be provided, but that it is still to go before the full council. There is no desire to conceal information. If we can disclose information, we will do so. However, we cannot disclose matters that are bound up with commercial confidentiality. I look for the support of the committee on that.

The Convener: It is important that we clear up matters that were included in the letter.

Ian Welsh: I want to repeat what I have said from the beginning. At what is still a delicate stage of the negotiations, it is entirely appropriate for the minister to be circumspect. Nicola says that the questions that she is asking are historical. They

are not historical; the negotiations are not concluded. It is entirely appropriate for the minister to proceed as she is, and for ministers not to agree to release information when other funding partners have not yet agreed to that.

11:15

Fiona McLeod: We must pin the minister down. We do not want her to keep repeating the same statement; we want some answers. Not only this committee wants answers—the whole of Scotland wants answers. We have been waiting since July, and we want to know what is happening.

I want to home in on the Scottish Executive's role in the Hampden saga. As Nicola said, the minister has made it quite clear—by the tone and content of her letter—that she is not prepared to discuss the rescue package with us. I think that that is wrong. However, she can discuss the background to it with us. We have to know that the Scottish Executive is accountable in this matter, as £45 million of public money has been invested in Hampden. We want to know what is happening to that money. Minister, can you tell me specifically what is the Scottish Executive's role in monitoring what has happened to the public money that has been invested in the National Stadium plc?

Your letter and Sam Galbraith's letter tell us that it was only in late July, when the Millennium Commission called the Scottish Executive, among others, to an emergency meeting, that the Executive became aware of just how bad the financial situation at Hampden was. How can that be, when the Executive is the holder of the public purse in Scotland? That is a fundamental question that needs to be answered.

You keep saying that you cannot tell us about the current negotiations, but you go on to say in your letter that you will want a viable management structure and a "fully developed business plan" to be put in place. Are you telling this committee that when you started investing public money in this project as far back as 1996-97 there was not a viable business plan or a viable management structure? If that is the case, the Scottish Executive was negligent in its use of public funds.

The questions that I have asked are of historical value and do not relate to the confidential commercial decision-making that is happening at the moment. Surely you can answer them.

Rhona Brankin: We were alerted to the situation at the end of July. Since then, as I have said, the head of the sports policy unit—

Fiona McLeod: Convener, can I press for an answer?

The Convener: Can we let the minister try to give an answer?

Fiona McLeod: She is saying the same again.

The Convener: If she does not answer your question, Fiona, you will be allowed back in.

Rhona Brankin: If I can be allowed to reply, the member made several points and then asked some questions. I am trying to point out—perhaps unsuccessfully, in Fiona McLeod's case—the seriousness with which we view the problems at Hampden stadium and the steps that we have taken to resolve the problem.

Since we were informed in late July, the senior official in this area has spent 75 per cent of his time dealing with the issue. Other senior officials, including some concerned with finance, accountancy, law and the enterprise network, have also devoted significant amounts of time to the issue. There have been more than 20 internal meetings—meetings with the consultants, the National Stadium, Queen's Park Football Club, other co-funders, the Scottish Football Association and the Royal Bank of Scotland. There have been many exchanges of correspondence and telephone contacts, and ministers have been kept closely informed and consulted. We have been working very hard to resolve these difficulties, and I repudiate any accusation that we have been sitting on our hands.

On monitoring, we have said that no money will go out until we are satisfied that a new management structure will be put in place and until the co-funders are satisfied that there will be a fully developed business plan. When the original money was committed to Hampden, we were satisfied that there was a business plan, but there have been problems and some mistakes have been made. We must ensure that those mistakes are not repeated; as I have already said, we have to be sure that a full business plan is in place and that the stadium will be financially viable on a long-term basis. We are committing the money on that basis, and I hope that the committee will support that.

The Convener: Brian?

Fiona McLeod: Convener, really—

The Convener: Sorry, I promised that Fiona could rejoin the debate.

Fiona McLeod: You mentioned three main issues. One was monitoring for the future—what happened to the monitoring for the past? You have just said that you were satisfied, in the past, with the structures that were in place. You were satisfied, as a Government, to invest public money in a management structure and a financial structure that ended up, as far as we know, £4.4 million in debt. I must question you further on that.

Have you read the Queen's Park accounts for the end of December 1998? It is obvious that, at

that stage, there was a shortfall of £8 million. You cannot keep saying, "We will monitor for the future," and, "We were satisfied in the past." If that is evidence of the Scottish Executive being satisfied—if that is evidence of the monitoring procedures that were put in place by the Scottish Executive to track public funds—I must say that the SNP is not satisfied and takes the matter very seriously. We are talking about public funds. How can we have any hope in the future? You will not tell us about the negotiations that are taking place now, so we must judge by your past record, and the Scottish Executive's record in the matter is deplorable.

The Convener: We have tried to ensure that the committee operates as a committee of the Parliament. We have tried not to make it so political that members feel that they have to mention the parties that they represent. It was unfortunate that Fiona suggested that the SNP is the only party that is concerned. All members of the committee are equally concerned, and I hope that members will bear that in mind when they make comments such as those that have just been made.

Fiona McLeod: May I respond to that?

The Convener: You may, very briefly.

Fiona McLeod: I first raised the issue with you, as convener of the committee, in August. You wrote back to me that it was not a matter for the committee. If the convener of this committee makes that decision—which I have addressed at almost every meeting since then—I am left in the position of having to say that, as the shadow sports minister, I take the matter seriously.

The Convener: When you raised the issue with me, it was a question of recalling the committee to meet to investigate the situation. That was what I said was not appropriate then. The committee is obviously investigating what is going on here. The minister is present and we will ask any relevant questions. I do not want this meeting to break down into a political discussion. [*Interruption.*]

I ask Nicola Sturgeon not to interrupt me. I will ask her to speak when I have finished.

It is important that we try to operate as a committee, to get as much information as possible on the issue, which is of concern to all members. When people make comments such as Fiona's, that is unhelpful to the workings of the committee.

Michael Russell: I ask for my dissent to be recorded. That ruling has no basis in the operations of the committee and it fails to recognise that Fiona is entitled to refer to the party of which she is a member. We should move on, but I want to record my dissent at that ruling.

The Convener: That is fine. I now invite Brian to

ask his question.

Mr Monteith: Minister, your letter mentions a contribution of up to £4.4 million to the rescue package. Reading that, one would understand that the rescue package is more than £4.4 million. Can you tell us what the complete rescue package will be? Given the fact that the £4.4 million comes from the organisations that you list, which are all public organisations, is there also private money in the rescue package? Who are the contributors?

Rhona Brankin: Even with the £4.4 million, there is a funding gap. That money does not fill the existing gap. I have already explained to the committee who the contributors to that £4.4 million are. Do you want me to explain that again?

Mr Monteith: No. Who is contributing in addition to the £4.4 million? Who is filling the funding gap between the £4.4 million and the total rescue package?

Rhona Brankin: That is being negotiated at the moment.

Mr Monteith: Is that the commercial confidentiality that we cannot get beyond, to the heart of the matter?

Rhona Brankin: That is part of it. There are various issues. The committee should recognise the difficult negotiating position that the Government has been in. I do not want people to get the impression that this committee thinks that ministers have been withholding information that should be available to it. I would be concerned if people were to have that impression.

Mr Monteith: I shall continue with my line of questioning.

Your letter also claims that

"there would be little point in borrowing money to pay off debts on the capital element of the project which the stadium operation could not realistically service."

It is clear that the problem is one of capital; the stadium operation could not borrow the money, as it would not be able to service the debts. Later in your letter, you say:

"The project was always playing catch up in terms of the financing of the work because the full financial package was not in place when the redevelopment works began. It was known from the outset by all concerned that additional funding would need to be raised partly through a debenture scheme and partly through commercial sponsorship."

Are we, therefore, saying that the reason for the appearance of the funding gap is that the commercial input was significantly less than it was in the business plan? Alternatively, is the reverse true: that the money came in, but the spending on the development was greater? Was it a combination of both?

Rhona Brankin: Sorry, Brian, I was reading.

Will you repeat the question?

Mr Monteith: Yes, certainly.

Your letter explains that the problem has been a shortfall in the funds available to cover the capital element. The shortfall is so large that it could not be borrowed by the National Stadium, as the borrowing would be so great that it could not be financed. Negotiations are taking place to try to resolve that difficulty. That suggests to me—and I would like you to confirm this—that you are having to find a way in which to write off some of that capital debt, so that any other borrowings are affordable.

Your letter also suggests, halfway through the penultimate paragraph, that

“the full financial package was not in place when the redevelopment works began.”

Frankly, I find that astounding. Your letter goes on to say:

“It was known from the outset by all concerned that additional funding would need to be raised partly through a debenture scheme and partly through commercial sponsorship”—

in effect, through private input. Has that capital gap built up because of overspending, because of a lack of commercial support, or because of both?

Rhona Brankin: As you said, it was known that the stadium would need to find additional funding. That was going to be raised partly through the debenture scheme and partly through commercial sponsorship. Misjudgments have been made about how much money it would be possible to raise. There have been cost overruns for a number of reasons: the effect of inflation, as a result of the delay in commencing construction; the costs of acceleration to complete the works by May 1999, for the cup final; the adjustments to meet Union of European Football Associations and FIFA requirements; and underestimates of the costs of works that were necessary to meet safety guidelines.

Some works were carried out that were not included in the original project, but which were considered necessary for the stadium to operate fully and competitively. Those included re-laying the pitch, with consequential sideline adjustments, and a strengthening of trackside areas. The increased costs were only partially offset by income from commercial sponsorship—notably from British Telecommunications and Coca-Cola.

Mr Monteith: I have a final supplementary question.

The Convener: I ask you to be brief, as we are running out of time.

Mr Monteith: Your letter states that the Scottish cup final was staged successfully at the stadium,

last May. It might have been successful in comparison with the previous old firm match. However, two other stadiums were available, at which that match could have been held. You have said that additional costs were incurred by accelerating the redevelopment to hold that cup final in May. Surely it would have been better to hold the cup final elsewhere.

Why was the decision taken to accelerate the redevelopment and to build in extra costs that could not be met? Will the person who took that decision be held to account?

11:30

Rhona Brankin: We have to look to the future. We have a wonderful Scottish football stadium of which we can all be proud. There have been some cost overruns, the reasons for some of which I have specified. People were keen to see that match in Hampden and enjoyed the opportunity to visit the new stadium. I hope that we can go forward. We will have a rescue package in place shortly. Sam Galbraith will give a full statement to the Parliament, and I hope that we can all enjoy future matches in our new national stadium.

The Convener: Ian Jenkins, would you like to ask a question?

Michael Russell: I would like to ask a question.

Ian Jenkins: I indicated that I would like to ask a question about 15 minutes ago; Michael Russell and Brian Monteith have had several goes since then. I have nothing great to say, but I was before Michael.

I welcome the detail that the minister gave in her second last response, about the pitch realignments and so on. It is reasonable that we should be made aware of such things, as they were responsible for the cost overrun. However, I wonder what the point is of our finding things out today that we will probably find out in a few weeks anyway. What difference does it make if we hear about confidential details today or three weeks later? It only causes a stushie. We will find out those details and examine them thoroughly. I want to know the answers as much as anybody else. When the detail is done and the package is secure, we can crawl all over it.

Michael Russell: During the election, there was a stushie—if I may use Ian’s word—about Labour trying to attract votes by publicising its investment in a sports academy. I remember glossy pictures of people playing keepie-uppie and so on. Now we have, within the first few months of the Executive’s administration, a fiasco over Hampden about which we are not being informed. You have given us the remarkable piece of information that a new pitch had to be laid, minister. If the architects had

not thought of that before they built the stadium, there must have been serious problems with their plans. We have also had the fiasco with the tickets.

Does the Executive have confidence in the Scottish football authorities? Do the authorities have any confidence in the Executive? Would it not be better if you gave us some clear answers, so that the committee could contribute to rebuilding confidence in the Scottish football authorities rather than having this rather acrimonious and bad-tempered meeting? I have to say that the acrimony and ill temper are a result of frustration with your answers.

It would be better if you were open with us. Shall we start on the issue of Hampden?

Rhona Brankin: You might feel acrimonious and bad tempered but, mercifully, the other members of the committee are trying to have a constructive discussion about—

Michael Russell: In your opinion, which does not count for much.

Rhona Brankin: Convener, may I be allowed to speak? I find the behaviour of some of the members of the committee very difficult to deal with. I hope that you note that.

The committee has been given a letter from me that sets out the work that we have been doing to try to solve the problems at the Hampden stadium. I have given the committee details of the number of meetings that have been held. I assure members that the matter is important to us. That is reflected in the amount of work that we have done to find a solution.

I hope that the committee recognises that work and the Executive's commitment to finding a solution. We think that it is important that we have a high-quality national stadium for football in Scotland for us all to enjoy. I also hope that the committee recognises that a full statement will be made to Parliament and that unhelpful remarks at this stage prejudice the debate that is going on.

Michael Russell: I have a short supplementary question. With regard to the selling of the football tickets for Saturday, is the Executive satisfied with the arrangements that were made by the Scottish Football Association and, if not, what action does it intend to take?

Rhona Brankin: I have already covered that, but I will repeat myself if you want.

We all have concerns about what has happened with ticketing for Saturday. Sam Galbraith has already spoken to David Taylor, the chief executive of the SFA, and will get a report from him. We take the matter seriously and we welcome the fact that those holding the inquiry

have decided to write to the SFA.

The Convener: Thank you for that answer, minister.

The minister has kindly agreed to give us an extra 10 minutes of her time, so that the three members who are still waiting can ask their questions. I ask them to keep their questions brief.

Karen Gillon: I have a comment rather than a question. I find myself in the rather unusual position of agreeing with a member of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party. Like Brian Monteith, I think that we should have a private meeting to consider all the issues. I do not think that a private meeting would find itself in the press. If negotiations are at such a delicate stage, we should let them continue.

Brian is right: we need to consider a number of issues and learn from the mistakes that have been made.

Fiona McLeod: I will address my question to the committee as we do not get answers from the minister.

In the light of what Ian Jenkins and Karen Gillon have said about leaving the matter for a future discussion, I have to say that Hampden is in a dreadful mess. We have learned today just how bad the situation is. We have also learned that the minister and the Executive were satisfied that appropriate monitoring procedures were in place. They were satisfied with the business plan and the management structure. The committee would be negligent if it did not act before the next set of structures—which might be as deficient as the current one—is put in place. We have to examine how the Executive spends public money.

Nicola Sturgeon: We all hoped that we could leave matters to the Executive after today's meeting. I do not think that that can happen now.

Regardless of our views about the desirability of a private meeting, we would like an indication from the minister before she leaves today about whether she would be willing to attend such a meeting. In her letter, she says that the Executive would be

"anxious to explore with the Scottish Football Association the role it could play both in the future management of the stadium and in making the business plan as robust as possible."

Does the minister seriously think, following the ticketing fiasco, that the SFA would be capable of running the national stadium as a viable business? Does she think that it would be appropriate for the SFA to be both landlord and tenant at Hampden? That would not be appropriate for local authorities.

Rhona Brankin: Again, Nicola, I am sorry that you are unhappy with the responses that I have

given, but I have explained to the committee on many occasions that I am not able to give more information than is included in the letter.

It seems eminently sensible to the co-funders that the SFA should be involved in the running of the stadium. We have said that there will be no further financial contribution until the new management structure is in place and the co-funders are satisfied that there is a fully developed business plan to show that the stadium operation is viable in the long term.

With the SFA, we have explored the role that the SFA could play in the future management of the stadium and in making the business plan as robust as possible. That seems to be a sensible way to move, given that the SFA will be using the stadium for international matches. I hope that the committee recognises the importance of involving the SFA in that process, just as it is important that the Scottish Rugby Union be involved in Murrayfield.

Ian Welsh: I congratulate Rhona and her officials on painstakingly assisting in facilitating the rescue package for what will be a glorious national facility. The committee knows my views, but I repeat that I do not believe that there was a need for a new Hampden. Our needs were well served; the money should have been distributed to sports authorities in another way. However, the stadium is here and it is magnificent. I do not agree with Fiona McLeod that it is in a mess; it is highly irresponsible to suggest that it is. It is in the process of financial rescue.

We have had full answers from the minister, regardless of what other committee members suggest. The most interesting part of the comments on the problems with the Hampden project was the answers that Brian Monteith elicited. I think that we will discover that the project was mismanaged, but we will also discover the normal pitfalls that are associated with major capital projects.

I agree with Fiona that we will need to consider how we monitor public spending. The spending of local authorities is often scrutinised; I do not think that the Executive should be exempt from similar scrutiny.

I thank the minister for her full answers this morning.

Mr Stone: It is worth reminding ourselves that the committee is supreme. We have the power and the right to ask any questions we like. It is, technically, an offence for anyone to withhold evidence from us. However, we must ask ourselves whether we want to rock the boat as regards the case that Rhona Brankin has put to us about the delicate on-going negotiations.

I am minded to do what Ian Jenkins suggests. We should wait until the deal is put together and then—as Ian so colourfully put it—crawl all over the books.

The Convener: I thank the minister for attending the committee and for giving us the answers that she was able to. All of us share her concerns about Hampden and Scottish Opera. The committee is about to launch an inquiry into the national companies. Scottish Opera will be further discussed before that is settled.

I also thank the minister for giving us the extra time.

Michael Russell: I suggest that we take a short break.

The Convener: That is a good suggestion, Mike.

11:42

Meeting suspended.

11:50

On resuming—

The Convener: We return to agenda item 1, the evidence from the minister. Do we as a committee wish to make a submission on the national cultural strategy? That option is open to us.

Mr Monteith: I decline the option. Having already written a submission for our party, I would not want to bring party politics into the committee.

The Convener: You are quite entitled to write a submission for your party.

Michael Russell: The committee has the opportunity to comment on the reports as they go through. Making submissions is a matter for individual members, parties and, primarily, for the wider range of outside organisations. The committee will have its day but I am not sure that we would find it easy to take a clear line. I am sure that we could agree on bits and pieces, but I am not sure that we could agree on strategy. It might be better to comment as things proceed.

The Convener: I agree. I wanted to give the committee the opportunity to say whether it wished to make a submission, but the feeling is that we all have other ways of making submissions if we wish to do so.

On the future of the national stadium, Mike mentioned the possibility of taking evidence in private. I am opposed to private meetings in principle, so I suggest that we do not do that. However, I am aware that there may be some opposition to my view.

Nicola Sturgeon: This is astonishing. I, too, am

opposed in principle to private meetings and would not ordinarily suggest that committees go into private session to discuss matters of this nature. However, when we cannot get answers to questions in public because the answers are supposedly confidential—for reasons that nobody can quite understand—what alternative do we have to meeting in private other than to sit back and say that we as a committee have no role to play and that we are prepared to let the Executive go blindly down the road on which it appears to be embarked?

The Convener: I feel that there will be a difference of opinion on this matter that we will not be able to overcome. I will let Brian Monteith speak first and then, if necessary, we will put the matter to a vote.

Mr Monteith: Like you, convener, I have a general aversion to private meetings. However, over a number of months we have had difficulty obtaining some information on Hampden about which we have real questions. That information has been withheld from us because of commercial confidentiality. Members of the committee would be reassured if we had a private meeting at which the Executive could brief us fully on the background to the problem.

That said, we are not the Scottish Executive but a committee of the Parliament. It is not crucial that we receive that private briefing before the conclusion of the deal, because it would not enable us to facilitate the deal. It would simply mean that we had the same information as the Executive. However, it is important that we have the briefing. The minister was rather equivocal about whether she would agree to that, even following a deal, but it is important that we ask to have that opportunity, so that we can be reassured about what has happened—we can ask about what has gone wrong and what mistakes might be avoided in future.

I want the briefing to take place before the minister's statement to Parliament, as there would be no point in our having it after that. It is important that the committee is briefed between the deal being concluded and the minister attending our meeting. That compromise would give us the information that we require when it would be useful to committee members.

The Convener: That is an interesting suggestion.

Karen Gillon: I agree with Brian Monteith. There is a time and a place for everything. The negotiations are such that we can play no constructive part in them. If we are briefed privately, we cannot do anything with that information. The suggestion that we have the briefing before the announcement is made to

Parliament is helpful, and I support Brian's suggestion.

Michael Russell: There are three clear options. The first is to request evidence in private now. I do not agree with Karen Gillon that we could not do anything with such evidence. We could discuss it privately and make representations to the minister as a committee if we felt that the matter was not being handled properly. Nobody knows whether that is the case, as the minister was stonewalling for most of the morning. The second option is Brian Monteith's suggestion, which Karen supports, to have a briefing before the statement is made. Common courtesy demands that that is done, given the interest that the committee has shown in the matter. The third option is not to have a briefing at all. I propose that we choose the first option. If that does not succeed, I will support the second option.

The Convener: Are there any other comments?

Fiona McLeod: I reiterate Mike Russell's first point and say to Karen Gillon that we do not want the committee to become party to the negotiations. The committee's responsibility is to scrutinise the Executive. The present circumstance is that the National Stadium has a 40-year contract and must break that contract to put something different in its place. If we wait until after everything is in place, will we be faced with the fact that another organisation—which, as we heard this morning, might be the Scottish Football Association—has a 40-year contract?

What Mike says is right. The committee's duty is to scrutinise the Executive and to say to it, "We think that you are wrong on these points, and we suggest otherwise." That is why it is important for us to have the briefing now.

Ian Welsh: I do not believe that the minister was stonewalling. I think that she was being appropriately circumspect. The SFA placed a contract with the City of Glasgow Council; I heard its comments this morning on the appropriate managers of the facility. I agree with Brian Monteith's compromise that we could be briefed before the minister's statement in Parliament.

The Convener: There is a difference of opinion on the matter, so we need to take a vote on it. I said at the beginning of this meeting that I was not in favour of our having a briefing. However, in the spirit of compromise—and because I think that it would be useful—I am happy to accept Brian's proposition that we have a briefing before the statement in Parliament. I ask Brian to move a motion on that, and I ask Mike to move an amendment to that motion.

Mr Monteith: I move,

That the Scottish Executive be asked to give a private

briefing to the committee on Hampden Park, immediately before the proposed ministerial statement to Parliament.

Michael Russell: I move, as an amendment,

That the private briefing be held at the earliest opportunity.

The Convener: The question is, that we have the briefing at the earliest opportunity. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Convener: There will be a division.

FOR

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Ian Welsh (Ayr) (Lab)

The Convener: The result of the division is as follows: For 3, Against 7, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Convener: The question is, that the Scottish Executive be asked to give a private briefing to the committee on Hampden Park, immediately before the proposed ministerial statement to Parliament.

FOR

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)
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)

The Convener: The result is as follows: For 10, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

National Arts Companies (Inquiry)

12:00

The Convener: Item 2 is on our inquiry into the national arts companies, which we wish to proceed with next week. Members will have received a paper that suggests a remit and witnesses for the inquiry. Do members have any comments on the paper?

Michael Russell: I have a number of comments.

We will require more time with Scottish Opera. I suggest that, on Tuesday 17, we see the Scottish Arts Council for an hour maximum, because it will be giving us factual information on its support for the national companies. I suggest that we see Scottish Opera for an hour to an hour and a quarter—or even an hour and a half—and Scottish Ballet for the rest of the meeting, as our questions will be principally about Scottish Opera.

The composition of the delegations from Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet is important. It would be unhelpful if only the new chair was present; we must also request the presence of the previous chair and Ruth Mackenzie, who was in charge until her recent resignation. If they will not appear as part of Scottish Opera's delegation, we must request them to appear in front of the committee as individuals. The clerk will have to negotiate with them to see whether that can be done.

On Wednesday 1 December, we will hear from the national theatre. I suggest that we add the Saltire Society to the agenda, which has, over many years, taken a strong position on this matter. I suspect that Paul Scott, who has been a strong supporter of the national theatre for many years, will wish to appear.

The Convener: Are there any problems with that? I am quite happy with Mike's suggestions.

Mr Monteith: The third bullet point under point 4 of the brief talks about the appropriateness of establishing "a national theatre for Scotland". I think that the word "company" should be inserted so that we are talking about "a national theatre company", because if we start to talk about establishing a national theatre, we will get into tremendous difficulties—it will confuse us and get in the way.

I support Mike's comments on Ruth Mackenzie—it would be impossible to get a clear picture of the timing of events without being able to speak to her.

Michael Russell: I support positively the idea that we should hear representations from the

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. We should hear not just from COSLA, but from people in COSLA who can talk about the educational aspect of the national companies—the touring companies' involvement in education and local authority support for the national companies.

Mr Monteith: Another organisation with something to say on this subject is the British Council, which will have an important input into the international aspect of the national companies. Undoubtedly, there will be opportunities for a national theatre company to tour and the British Council may wish to give us details on its role.

The Convener: Although I do not disagree with that suggestion, we will run into timing difficulties if we invite everyone. Could we ask the British Council to provide us with a written submission?

Mr Monteith: I am happy with a written submission.

The Convener: If we have further questions, we could invite representatives from the British Council to the final inquiry meeting, which would avoid too many people coming to the earlier meetings.

Mr Monteith: I am happy with that, but I think that the British Council should be approached for a written submission.

Mr Stone: I have just checked with Gillian and I understand that we are light on festivals. I have already declared an interest in one festival, but what do we do about the Edinburgh International Festival or the St Magnus Festival, which are both significant spenders and users of public money?

Michael Russell: We could adequately deal with the national companies through the interface between the Scottish Arts Council and the companies themselves.

I have three further points. First, we should invite submissions from any member of the public who wishes to submit evidence—at this stage, such evidence should be in writing rather than in person. The clerk should publicise the inquiry through the parliamentary press office. More witnesses may emerge as a result of those submissions.

Secondly, we need a full and comprehensive introductory statement from each person who gives evidence to us. They should be asked to provide that in writing at least three or four days before we are due to take evidence from them. That is a tight time scale, but this is an important matter.

Thirdly, at our most recent meeting, I suggested that we should ask researchers to produce for the committee a briefing document on the national companies.

Gillian Baxendine: The committee is free to invite written submissions. If members want to complete the inquiry in December, a number of people will feel that they are being given too little time to comment—members would have to live with that.

I have discussed with the researchers the possibility of their producing a written briefing. They will do what they can, but pressure of work means that, in a week, such a briefing will be fairly limited. They have offered to help to frame questions that the committee might want answered. The Scottish Arts Council, too, will provide as much factual briefing as possible.

Michael Russell: We must also get written material from each company and from those giving evidence. There is a lot of enthusiasm for this inquiry and the companies will want to give us written material, as it is in their interests to do so, but it must be received in time for us to read it.

Gillian Baxendine: I will certainly tell them that. The next witnesses are due to appear here next week and have been alerted to that.

Michael Russell: It is essential that Scottish Opera gives us factual information and is prepared to answer questions fully and constructively.

Mr Stone: When we invite witnesses, is it made absolutely clear that they have to answer questions? Is it made clear that that is the power of this committee?

Gillian Baxendine: One does not usually need to stress that, as people are extremely anxious to come before parliamentary committees and want to be seen to be helpful. It can be stressed where it is considered necessary.

The Convener: It might be helpful to ensure that people are aware that questions will be asked.

Cathy Peattie: I agree with Mike Russell that we need to have information beforehand. It is not good enough to have it an hour before the meeting. We need to be able to consider what questions we want to ask.

Fiona McLeod: When we are considering the matter of a national theatre, it will be useful to meet representatives of the Scottish Youth Theatre, which is already a national theatre and has plans for a building. Such a meeting might inform our discussion.

The Convener: We will take that on board.

We will try to get written material to people as promptly as possible, so that we are informed before beginning our discussions.

At the previous meeting, we agreed that we would have four reporters on various issues. Members who have been appointed as reporters

should discuss their remits and the way in which researchers can help them with Gillian Baxendine, so that they can get as much help as possible.

Excellence and Equity Conference

The Convener: Item 3 is the excellence and equity conference on 9 December. The committee will have had a chance to consider this. Are any members interested in attending? The conference is important, but I understand that there may be difficulties over the time scale.

Nicola Sturgeon: Is it an invitation to attend as an observer or as a speaker?

The Convener: It is an invitation to attend as an observer, so that we are informed about issues that may arise from the improvement in the education bill.

Mr Stone: I propose that we send the convener.

Michael Russell: Is there any fee? There is an issue over fees for conferences, which has been discussed elsewhere. The Scottish Parliament has to be kept informed and has to pay its way but, given that we are spending public money, fees for members to attend conferences should, in principle, be avoided. If the conference is prepared to have an observer from the committee, our participation should be on that basis.

The Convener: I understand that there is a budget to enable committee members to attend conferences. I do not suggest that we start eating into it but, in view of some of our discussions, I think that this conference will be useful. I suggest that the committee send me or a substitute to represent it at the conference. We can feed back information to the committee.

Fiona McLeod: This may sound stupid: I think that I will be attending that conference—I think that I have been invited as a speaker—but I am not sure.

The Convener: Do we agree to send our chair or a substitute, but that if we find out in the meantime that Fiona is attending and will not have to go, she should go on our behalf?

Members: Yes.

The Convener: I want to ask a question that is not on the agenda. It concerns the arena in which we find ourselves. I would appreciate committee members' comments on meeting here in the chamber, rather than in one of the smaller committee rooms.

Michael Russell: The big advantage of the chamber is that it allows our questioning of witnesses to be televised, which is obviously

important. The disadvantage is that it makes it somewhat difficult to conduct that questioning.

The Convener: I should correct you—this meeting is not being televised.

Michael Russell: In that case, we should not be in here and we are wasting our time. You are right—at the moment the BBC can televise only one meeting at a time. In that case, we should meet in a smaller committee room. However, there will be much interest in the Scottish Opera hearing and we should meet in the room from which it can be televised. I assumed that we were in the chamber because we wanted to be televised asking the minister questions—if that is not happening, this is not the best place for us.

The Convener: The difficulty was that another committee had already said that a minister would be present, so it had first use of committee room 1, which at the moment is the only committee room from which meetings can be televised.

Michael Russell: That is very poor.

The Convener: It is obviously a difficulty. The only thing that I would say—and I have mixed feelings about meeting here—is that the chamber allows more members of the public and the press to attend. There was a great deal of interest in this meeting, so I thought that we should try meeting here today to enable people to attend. However, meeting in the chamber gives rise to practical difficulties.

Michael Russell: We must be able to meet whenever we wish to meet and, because there is a shortage of space, we accept that we may have to meet here. I do not think that the chamber is as good as one of the committee rooms, but if we are last in the queue, so be it.

Mr Monteith: I would say that the chamber is preferable to all the committee rooms, apart from committee room 1, from which meetings are televised. For meetings such as the one that we have had today, if we are unable to meet in committee room 1, I would prefer us to meet here rather than in committee rooms 4, 3 or even 2.

The Convener: I thank members for their comments, which will be fed back.

Michael Russell: Would it be possible, when we are questioning only one witness in the chamber, to have that witness sit in front of where the minister sat, and for us to sit rather closer to them? The current set-up is a bit theatrical.

The Convener: The reasoning behind that was that if members sit on the front benches at the side, their view can be blocked by the mace and the desk on which it stands. However, we will try what Mike has suggested. This meeting was really a trial run.

Meeting closed at 12:12.

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