

# **EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 29 May 2001  
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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## EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2001, Session 1

### CONVENER

\*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

\*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

\*Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

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

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

\*attended

### WITNESSES

Riona Bell (Scottish Executive Finance Group)

John Elvidge (Scottish Executive Education Department)

Nicol Stephen (Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs)

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Judith Evans

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

### LOCATION

Committee Room 2



## Scottish Parliament

### Education, Culture and Sport Committee

*Tuesday 29 May 2001*

*(Afternoon)*

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 12:36*]

**The Deputy Convener (Cathy Peattie):** Good afternoon. Some members of the committee were at a meeting with the Scottish Qualifications Authority in Glasgow this morning. The convener took the train and I drove back to Edinburgh to try to ensure that one of us was here for the start of the meeting—it looks as though the car beat public transport. We expect Karen Gillon to arrive soon.

I welcome Nicol Stephen, the Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs. I realise that the minister is in a hurry so we will start right away.

### Item in Private

**The Deputy Convener:** Can we agree to take item 5 in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Budget Process 2002-03

**The Deputy Convener:** Item 2 is on the budget process. We had a paper, on which I was reporter, in which we pulled together several questions and asked for a response from the Executive. That response is now in front of us. Members might need a few minutes to read that response.

Minister, it is difficult to make sense of some of the performance indicators that need to be included in the budget to ensure that the education targets are in place. I am sure that you will agree that several objectives that need to be met were not as clear in the budget as they could be. I am thinking of targets relating to access, equal opportunities in education and early intervention. There is a general feeling that those issues could be dealt with better. I know that ministers elsewhere have agreed on some of them. Perhaps that is something that we are striving towards. Do you want to comment on that, minister?

**The Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (Nicol Stephen):** I understand what you are saying. The targets are very clear and the department is working hard to achieve them. We are all learning. I went through a similar process last year with the enterprise and lifelong learning budget. The way in which information is presented—moving towards showing real-terms figures and improving the layout so that financial information matches the department's objectives and the non-financial targets more closely—is an area in which we can improve. We hope to learn from year to year, and to make those improvements as soon as possible.

I think that all of us here—although I do not want to put words in the mouths of officials—recognise that there are changes that we would like to make for next year. Some of those will be suggested internally by us, but if there are additional changes that the committee wishes to suggest, we are willing to take those on board. Over the next couple of years, there will be significant improvements in the layout and presentation of the information, so that it will be a more useful tool and will be more clearly understood. Not only MSPs but those who are interested in Scottish education and the general public may be able to use it.

**Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** Is the deputy minister able to answer questions on the cultural and sport aspects of the paper?

**The Deputy Convener:** No, he is answering questions only on education.

**Nicol Stephen:** That is what I have been asked to do.

**Irene McGugan:** Indeed, but issues also arise about culture and sport.

**Nicol Stephen:** If there are such issues, I would be happy to take a note of them, or the committee could write separately to Allan Wilson, the Deputy Minister for Sport, the Arts and Culture—whatever would be most helpful.

**The Deputy Convener:** In my capacity as reporter on budgets, I suggest that we need at some stage to flag up issues around culture and the cultural strategy.

I now hand over the chair to Karen Gillon.

**The Convener (Karen Gillon):** I invite Frank McAveety to ask the next question.

**Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** On the written response that you have given in relation to the allocation of £141.8 million for child care and pre-school education, does that take account of—

**Nicol Stephen:** Sorry, which question are you talking about?

**Mr McAveety:** Question 5. Essentially, the committee has taken on board the comments made by the Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs about the prioritisation on adoption and fostering, and we have highlighted the figures that relate to that, but the response to that question states:

“Funding for adoption and fostering is contained within local authority GAE.”

What process could there be for ensuring that, if new approaches are taken on fostering, looked-after children and adoption, the allocation of grant-aided expenditure would find its way to those areas in an appropriate manner?

**Nicol Stephen:** As members know, there applies right across our educational priorities a balance between the approach of ring-fencing money through the excellence funds, which is a way to ensure that funding is allocated to our priorities by local authorities, and the alternative approach, which is to allocate the funding through the normal GAE process and to encourage the addressing of our priorities in partnership with local authorities. The question of what is the best way forward involves balance and judgment. We know that ring fencing can be unpopular with local authorities, although it can be welcomed by those sectors of education that gain from it.

There are different solutions: for example, we provide quite significant funding to such organisations as British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, the National Foster Care Association and Family Care and Adoption UK. Such voluntary sector and charitable sector organisations could be very effective providers of solutions in relation

to new initiatives.

The first stage is to have the review and to examine the priorities for action. Then, no doubt, we will require to hold discussions not only with the committee but with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and voluntary sector organisations, to decide how best to resource our new priorities. At the ministerial level, we are saying that there is a commitment to shift resources and that, once the review has been carried out, we regard this area as a priority.

12:45

**Mr McAveety:** Can you make a reasonable guesstimate of how much has been spent on fostering, care and adoption? I am conscious that the review will be a process of examining how appropriate that spending is, as well as examining the procedures, and that recommendations will be made based on the concomitant impact. Are we clear about the situation at the moment?

**Nicol Stephen:** We are not sufficiently clear. We do not have readily available figures on adoption expenditure in local authority areas. We will have to consider that spending, however. We know that, in the current financial year, £5.2 million will be delivered by the local authorities through the changing children's services development fund, which is included in the GAE for the transitional scheme for community-based placements—for fostering services, in other words. We know part of the picture.

One of the changes that will come about as a result of the establishment of the Scottish Parliament is that we will have better information about a range of services that are provided through funding from the education department. Adoption and fostering is one of the areas in which we need to see more information sooner rather than later. Clearly, an important review of the type that we are carrying out at the moment will require basic financial information. That is crucial to good-quality policy making.

**Irene McGugan:** We asked a question about how much of the changing children's services fund was allocated under the young people and looked-after children budget and were told that the 2000 spending review identified £15 million in the first year and £17.5 million in the following year. Is that the total allocation for the changing children's services fund? Does it all come under the heading of the young people and looked-after children budget or does it appear elsewhere?

We also asked whether the drop in pupil support under the schools budget took into account any spending related to the changing children's services fund. The answer seems to imply that the drop in pupil support is compensated for by the

excellence fund. I would like to be clear about the parameters of the funds and which budget headings they come under. I want to know where the money is coming from.

**Nicol Stephen:** I hope that I will be corrected by my officials if I get the figures wrong. The information about the sources of the changing children's services fund is as follows. For 2001-02, no funding is allocated. I think that there is also a small element of drugs initiative funding, but I am not sure whether that is part of the changing children's services fund budget. I will ask Riona Bell to clarify that later. The education department funding is £15 million in 2002-03 and £17.5 million in 2003-04. Drugs initiative funding is allocated to the education department but is separately identified. It comes to £7 million in the first year, and £9 million in the second. Health department funding comes to £10 million in 2002-03 and, again, £10 million in 2003-04. Development department funding comes to zero in 2002-03 and £5 million in 2003-04. That comes to £32 million in the first year and £41.5 million in the second, which makes a grand total of £73.5 million.

**Riona Bell (Scottish Executive Finance Department):** There is a small amount of drugs funding for this year, but the fund is deemed to start in 2002-03.

**Nicol Stephen:** From next year, the £1 million for drugs initiative funding will be taken as part of the changing children's services fund. This year that £1 million is identified as drugs initiative funding under the education budget heading.

**Irene McGugan:** In the future, will the changing children's services fund have its own budget heading? At the moment, it looks as if it is allocated under the young people and looked-after children's budget heading.

**Nicol Stephen:** At the moment, it is spread across different budget headings.

**Irene McGugan:** Will it continue to be allocated in that way, so that we have to pick it out here and there?

**Nicol Stephen:** Irene McGugan is suggesting that it would be helpful if the £73.5 million that has been announced for the changing children's services fund was identified separately, with an explanation to show from which headings the fund has come. I presume that her request to do that would apply to other cross-cutting initiatives or to initiatives that affect more than one department. That would mean that, although the money continues to be sourced back to the department, members can see clearly how the fund is made up.

**Irene McGugan:** We would find that helpful.

**Nicol Stephen:** I guess that that must apply to

allocations such as the money that is available for action on drugs. We will do that, as we all agree with that suggestion.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** At the start of the meeting, I made the point that it would be useful for the Education, Culture and Sport Committee to see the amount of money that has been spent on initiatives and the amount that is heading for initiatives. Further down the line, if we know where the money is coming from and how it is being used, we can measure how well it has worked or whether it is enough.

**Nicol Stephen:** I would like to ask Riona Bell if she is aware of plans to have a separate section for cross-cutting initiatives in the budget or to identify the source of those funds in the lead department's budget?

**Riona Bell:** Because of the way that the statutory powers are divided up, the money has to stay in the department through which it will be delivered. We can identify separately how much there is for each of the cross-cutting initiatives, as that is a separate issue.

**Nicol Stephen:** For the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's interest, we will look at doing that for all the areas where we make a contribution to cross-cutting funds. In future years, we will try to ensure that that is presented more understandably.

**Cathy Peattie:** That would be helpful.

We asked a number of questions about McCrone and got some answers. However, we are interested in the implications for the education budget of McCrone. Will the minister expand on his answers on that subject?

**Nicol Stephen:** Does Cathy Peattie want me to start by answering some specific questions from the committee or to make a general comment on McCrone?

**Cathy Peattie:** A general comment.

**Nicol Stephen:** The committee is asking whether there are changes as a consequence of McCrone. The straightforward answer is yes.

Significant transfers have been made from central Government education funding across to local government education funding. The figures were first released at an early stage of the McCrone discussions. We felt that it was prudent, for reasons that everyone would understand, not to include the money that we had allocated towards McCrone in the local government budget line, as that could have driven the outcome of negotiations that were then at a sensitive stage.

As a result, the schools budget heading in particular was inflated by quite significant amounts of money for future years and also for the current

year, which at that time was 2000-01. If we get into the detail of that, quite a lot of explanation is necessary to begin to understand that. Once that money has been taken away from central Government education and transferred into local government education, there are still quite significant increases in, for example, the schools budget going forward from 2001-02 into the next financial year and the final financial year that is shown in these figures, which is 2003-04.

The reassurance that we can give you is that the figures that are in this document will have no impact on the core education programme that had been planned because that had been anticipated and the funds had been allowed for. We were preparing for the settlement that was eventually reached and money had been provided for it. I do not have to draw your attention to any area where, because of the teachers' pay and conditions deal, we have had to cut back on the proposed budget.

**Cathy Peattie:** The full implications of McCrone will not be realised this year and next. Do you see that happening to planned projects in future?

**Nicol Stephen:** That is right. There are implications beyond 2003-04, which is not only beyond the period of the plans but beyond the next election, in 2003. We will be making plans for those years before 2003. That is something that we will have to consider. The only thing that I draw to your attention is that we are still due to make an announcement on year 3—2003-04—about the funding of the teachers' pay and conditions deal for that year. The figures in front of you have all the funding that is required for the first two years.

There is a letter from Jack McConnell to Norman Murray—which I can make available to the committee if it does not already have it—which sets out some of the quite complex agreements arranged with COSLA. Those agreements were subject to close scrutiny by COSLA, which would not have signed up to the teachers' pay and conditions deal if it had not felt that it was a reasonable settlement that allowed it to make the funding available to the teachers on terms that were acceptable to the local authorities.

**Cathy Peattie:** Money has been allocated for new community schools and there are plans for such schools in future. What has been done to ensure that that money has been used to develop new community schools and has not simply become part of the schools budget or been used to do what the school would be doing anyway? How do we ensure that that additionality happens?

**Nicol Stephen:** At present, we are funding only new community schools pilot projects, so we can be certain at the moment that the funding is additional and is being provided for specific proposals that local authorities are submitting to

the Executive. There is a direct link between the money that the Executive is providing and the outcomes that we would like to see at the local level.

That is not to say that we have been prescriptive about how new community schools should be managed and organised. There is the common theme in all of them of joined-up working—different professional disciplines working more closely together. However, we want a variety of different solutions. We will monitor those and report on the outcomes in due course. We will consider the pilot projects carefully to learn lessons from them.

The trick will come at the next stage, where we expect to fund a rolling-out of new community schools throughout Scotland. We have still to make an announcement on that within the funding that is set out in this document. We hope to be able to make further announcements that allow for that to happen. At that stage it will be for us to decide whether we carry on with the current model—which takes a centralised approach, although it is still at the pilot stage—or try to devolve the role to local authorities.

That brings us back to some of the issues that Frank McAveety raised in relation to adoption and fostering and how we work in partnership with local authorities and make sure that money continues to be spent on the sort of high-quality new community schools initiatives that we have seen at the pilot stage.

13:00

**Cathy Peattie:** There was a discussion at an early stage about the pilots developing governance for the new community schools, which would be separate from the education system. Has that moved on?

**John Elvidge (Scottish Executive Education Department):** It has moved on in some of the new community school pilots. They vary a great deal and not all of them have explored governance, but we are content that enough pilots have begun to explore governance to give us useful evidence to pass on to schools when we get the results of the major evaluation research, which is due later this year.

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Are the new community schools that are running out of their first three years of funding currently funded from the centre?

**John Elvidge:** Yes.

**Ian Jenkins:** How do you arrive at a figure for the special educational needs budget? Is it based on what you can afford, which you say must be used for special educational needs, or is there an



assessment of how much training is needed and how many extra teachers there must be for special educational needs? I know that money is earmarked for that, but how are the calculations done?

**Nicol Stephen:** On the detail of that, I will bring in John Elvidge again, but it is important to emphasise that the most significant part of special educational needs funding comes through GAE. We tend to focus on the central Government element, and to talk about the money for mainstreaming through the excellence fund, the money for training initiatives and some of the specific grants that are made available. However, the lion's share of funding for special educational needs is devolved to local authorities, which therefore must make many of the judgments and assessments.

In terms of the increases in funding in the Scottish budget, I ask John Elvidge to comment on how we calculate the increase in funding for mainstreaming—which is going up from approximately £6.5 million to about £13 million—and training, and the benefits that arise from them.

**John Elvidge:** There is a combination of the two approaches to which Ian Jenkins referred. When something is happening throughout the special educational needs sector, we can often cost it reasonably accurately through discussion with local authorities. If one can identify developments that will have similar effects on, for example, staff numbers throughout the sector, it is possible to calculate the costs reasonably mechanistically.

However, much of what is happening in the special educational needs sector does not fall into that category. Different schools and different education authorities are moving at different paces and starting from different points. A judgment is made of the pace at which change is likely to occur, in terms of the way in which schools are run, and of capital costs, for example for adaptations to schools. When we can quantify amounts precisely, we try to do that; otherwise we make a judgment in discussions with local authorities.

**Ian Jenkins:** It is also difficult for members to know the answer when a minister talks about £20 million of funding and then asks us whether we consider that that is a great amount or not enough. Is there a formula that would assist us in knowing whether the sums were adequate? I knew before I asked that question that matters are not that simple.

**Nicol Stephen:** I said in the SEN debate in Parliament that I am sympathetic to the idea of a strategy for special educational needs and that I will raise such matters with the SEN forum. In some ways, the matter is more complex because

we hoped that as mainstreaming progressed, there would be a fall in the expenditure on existing special schools. About £200 million is allocated to local authorities in respect of special educational needs. Over time, we hope to see a shift in how that money is spent. We want some money to be released for mainstreaming, on top of the additional funding that the Executive is making available for initiatives such as adaptations to schools, and changes to materials to make the curriculum more accessible to children who have special needs. All such matters need to be considered.

The committee, local authorities and those who are interested in special educational needs—teachers, parents and pupils—should move forward together and gain a better understanding of what is happening and how the shift in policy is creating a shift in resourcing. We must check whether resourcing is adequate. My commitment is to ensure that we reach the right solution for the children. It is a little like care in the community—it can be dealt with cheaply or expensively, but the key is to deal with it well. It is crucial to ensure that the policy with which we all agree in principle is delivered properly on the ground, with the right levels of resource and training. The change must be funded correctly.

**Ian Jenkins:** Consequential from the United Kingdom budget will come on stream. How will they be fed into the figures? What process will be followed?

**Nicol Stephen:** Such details have not been announced. Funding has been made available this year and for previous years, but we cannot assume that it will always be made available in future years. At present, such details are not contained in the budget documents.

The funding that has been announced is detailed under more than one budget head in the schools budget. I have asked about it, and the matter is not as simple as to say that such details can be found on a certain line. Riona Bell can give more details, if you wish.

**Ian Jenkins:** No. I was asking only about the principle.

**The Convener:** It would be helpful in future years if details of consequential money were made available to us. Our constituents often ask us about it. Schools, parents and authorities want to know where that money is and sometimes we cannot pick it out of the budget as easily as we would like. Obviously, the consequential money for the years to come will depend on that small event on 7 June.

**Nicol Stephen:** I will be happy to provide the committee with a letter that identifies the historic spend. It would be wrong for me to make any

announcements on future consequentials before 7 June.

**The Convener:** That would be helpful. It would be useful for the committee to know the breakdown. If there is future money, perhaps it would be useful to have it detailed in the budgets.

The budgets are a positive step forward, but we are dealing with how they are presented. We have commented on that last year and this year. If money could be traced, that would help people in Scotland to access information much more easily.

**Nicol Stephen:** The budget consequential figures are included for the past years and they therefore increase the budget for those historic years. The fact that we will still achieve real-terms increases in funding in future years underscores the point that any money from the UK Government would lead to even greater real-terms increases in the budget. It could be argued that we are not comparing apples with apples because we are considering historic spending plus UK budget consequentials that have been allocated to education. To make an accurate comparison with future spending, consequentials from the UK budget would have to be included. There might well be consequentials, although I am not able to announce any today. They might be announced fairly soon—that would increase the education budget figures, but we will have to wait until after the general election to find out. However, this year and in future years, additional sums could increase the percentage real-terms rise in the education budget still further.

**The Convener:** As there are no further questions, I thank the minister.

**Nicol Stephen:** Not at all.

**The Convener:** Next year, we will factor in ministerial time much earlier than we did this year. We will enter such time in the diary now for next year's budget process.

**Nicol Stephen:** I look forward to that.

## Children's Commissioner

**The Convener:** Item 3 on the agenda is an update on the children's commissioner inquiry. We have appointed Alison Clelland as reporter. She is likely to begin her work about July 2001, when we have completed our initial investigations with the one-day seminar and the film.

On 14 May, I visited the Northern Ireland Assembly in Belfast. I met Edwin Poots, who is the chair of the Committee of the Centre. That committee is considering the issue of a children's commissioner. Our discussion was very worthwhile.

Their inquiry is probably further down the line than ours. They have about six weeks' evidence from parliamentarians from Europe and the UK, agencies and people who have particular experiences in Northern Ireland. They talked about the children's commissioner's role as an advocate, watchdog and champion—which is a very good analysis of what the commissioner's role could be.

We talked about a number of issues, including reserved and devolved matters. The Northern Irish and Welsh models have pushed me towards the idea that the commissioner should have an all-encompassing role and should consider both reserved and devolved matters. We also talked about how the commissioner would be funded. The Committee of the Centre is currently considering that and where the money would come from within the budget, should it go down that road.

Wales has moved much further down the road and has allocated a budget for the children's commissioner. We would have to consider how much budget would need to be allocated to a commissioner in Scotland.

We will have to consider the powers of the commissioner and the commissioner's relationship with other bodies. Wales and Ireland have urged that a protocol is needed for working between the commissioner and the agencies that already exist. We would probably want something similar to a concordat to be established.

The exercise has been useful. I will produce some reports when we make progress with the issue. Because the general election date was changed, the formal evidence-taking session will take place after the summer recess. It is unrealistic to start taking formal evidence before the recess, unfortunately. If we want to do the matter justice, we must do our work well, rather than quickly. We have asked for the matter to be factored into our agenda as soon as possible after the summer recess, when we will take evidence and make progress.

13:15

We will want to speak to the minister earlier rather than later in our discussions. In Wales, the civil service had much input into the process, which pushed forward the legislation early. The earlier that civil service input into the legislation takes place, the better, because the drafting of any legislation is time consuming and complex. It would be worth pursuing with the minister whether some support could be provided to our clerks and to our reporter—is it a reporter? What is the official title? Is that what we call them?

**Martin Verity (Clerk):** We will have an adviser.

**The Convener:** Thank you. If there were scope for some civil service support on information gathering, that might be helpful, because sometimes the civil service has greater access to information than we have. We should pursue that with the minister.

That is where things are. I am keeping the organisations that have written to us abreast of events, so that they do not think that the issue has fallen off our agenda. I have written to everybody who gave us evidence.

**Ian Jenkins:** It is important to get the civil servants in early. I presume that if ultimately we recommended that a commissioner should be appointed, a bill would have to be introduced and more consultation would take place, which would almost repeat the process that we will undertake by taking evidence. I do not know how we could do it, but if we could tee things up so that as soon as we have taken evidence we could publish a draft bill, that would mean that the process was more telescoped.

**The Convener:** As I understand it, the evidence-taking session in Wales ran as the pre-legislative scrutiny, so that work did not have to be replicated. Because people in Wales were involved and knew that a commissioner was planned, they were able to work in that way. We have not said, "Yes, we are going to establish a commissioner." Before we start taking evidence, perhaps we should have that discussion. If we agree that a commissioner should be appointed, we will then get into the nuts and bolts and could maybe short-circuit the system.

All the evidence that we have received has said that there should be a commissioner, but the evidence has not examined the bread-and-butter issues of how the post would work, how the commission would be implemented, what the responsibilities would be or how the funding would come on stream. The principle is fine. The practical implementation is the point at which there is a disagreement. Perhaps at our first session with the minister we should consider whether we could short-circuit the system.

**Ian Jenkins:** That is what I was saying. There might come a point when we want to make a statement that in principle we want to agree that there should be a commissioner and get a draft bill out on which we can consult and take evidence, at the same time as we refine our views.

**The Convener:** I might be wrong, but I think that in Wales, a draft bill was not even produced.

**Ian Jenkins:** We will have to produce one.

**The Convener:** Yes, but we could agree to the principle, because we do not have to go through the UK Parliament. It would be useful to find out whether there is a mechanism whereby, if we agreed to the principle, the detailed evidence taking could be conducted as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny. I do not know whether that is within our competence, but it is worth pursuing. If that is not possible, the time for implementation will probably be extended by six or seven months.

**Cathy Peattie:** For pre-legislation work, we need civil service back-up. The issue needs to be taken seriously. We cannot merely add it to our agenda—we will need additional back-up. It would help if the committee considered what it wants to do and where it will start. The adviser will help us to do that. There is a will out there for a children's commissioner and there has been for some time. However, if we are going to go down that road, we need to get this right. We cannot assume that a particular way forward exists before we have taken evidence. We would need back-up in order to short-circuit the procedures. People need to know what could happen.

**The Convener:** There might be space in our agenda for Tuesday 26 June to have that initial discussion, after our one-day event. That would be informative. We can factor in an initial discussion on that day. Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Committee Travel

**The Convener:** I ask Cathy Peattie to update members on agenda item 4, which is on committee travel.

**Cathy Peattie:** The issue relates to my reporting on traditional arts. Members might recall that I asked whether I could make some additional visits en route to Stornoway. I have found that what I wanted to do is impossible, because of the ferry timetables and my requirement to be at Stornoway at a specified time. I wanted to go to Skye, to meet Arthur Cormack of Feis Rois, and to go to Plockton. I had planned to go up one way and down the other. That will be impossible at that time, but I am still keen to do it.

I ask whether I might visit the Highland music festival at the end of June, which is launched at Plockton on a Friday. That would give me a chance to meet some kids, speak to teachers and speak to people who are involved in the music centre there; members will recall that an arts centre is an integral part of petition PE307. Feis Rois people will be there. I would have a chance to speak to them and some of the other people who would be quite helpful to the inquiry. That would mean staying overnight on Friday 22 June.

**The Convener:** I see no problems with that. If we receive a costed paper, I will propose it to the conveners liaison group for approval. Are members happy with that?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

13:22

*Meeting continued in private until 13:53.*

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