



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 15 June 2011

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INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2011, Session 4

CONVENER

*Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con)

*Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)

*Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)

*Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

Committee Room 3

Scottish Parliament

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

Wednesday 15 June 2011

[Malcolm Chisholm *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Interests

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Good morning everyone and welcome to the first meeting of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee in the fourth session of the Scottish Parliament. I should explain that I am in the chair only briefly, as I am the oldest member of the committee. That is one of the perks of seniority—I was going to say “old age”, but that is not quite right.

I remind everyone who is present, including members, that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be turned off completely, because they interfere with the sound system even when they are switched to silent.

Item 1 is the declaration of interests. In accordance with section 3 of the code of conduct for members of the Scottish Parliament, I invite members to declare interests that are relevant to the committee's remit. I remind members that declarations should be brief but sufficiently detailed to make clear to a listener the nature of the interest.

I declare my membership of Unison and the Educational Institute of Scotland.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): The only thing that I want to draw attention to is in the gifts section of my entry in the register of members' interests. On 31 July 2009, I hosted an event that was sponsored by Eaga plc, which might be relevant to the committee.

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I have no registrable interests.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I declare an interest in relation to the committee's public transport role: I am currently still an employee of a bus company that is based in Edinburgh.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I have no declarable interests.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I have no declarable interests.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I am a West Lothian Council councillor but I do not take any salary from that. I am also a member of the EIS.

Malcolm Chisholm: I thank everyone.

Convener

10:01

Malcolm Chisholm: Item 2 is the choice of convener. The Scottish Parliament has agreed that members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as convener of the committee. That being the case, I seek nominations for the position.

Adam Ingram: I nominate Maureen Watt.

Gordon MacDonald: I second that.

Malcolm Chisholm: One nomination has been received, therefore I ask the committee to agree that Maureen Watt be chosen as convener of the committee.

Maureen Watt was chosen as convener.

Malcolm Chisholm: That ends my time in the chair. Thank you.

The Convener (Maureen Watt): Good morning everyone. I thank you all for choosing me as convener of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee. I was convener of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee in the previous session of the Parliament, and members of that committee managed to work fairly well together, got on with the job in hand and, as far as possible, did not let party politics interfere with the committee's work. In this session, as we deal with capital investment—and there will be less of it—it is important that we try to work together as far as possible.

Deputy Convener

10:02

The Convener: Item 3 is the choice of deputy convener. Members have a note from the clerk setting out the procedure for selecting the deputy convener. As you see, it is similar to the procedure for selecting the convener. The Parliament has agreed that members of the Scottish National Party are eligible to be chosen as deputy convener of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee. That being the case, I invite nominations for the position.

Adam Ingram: I nominate Jamie Hepburn.

Gordon MacDonald: I second that.

The Convener: One nomination has been received, therefore I ask the committee to agree that Jamie Hepburn be chosen as deputy convener of the committee.

Jamie Hepburn was chosen as deputy convener.

Work Programme

10:04

The Convener: Item 4 is our approach to developing a work programme. It is not really the intention to have a full discussion of the forward work programme at this meeting, but I invite members to flag up ideas for any future areas of work. I do not think that we should rush into making commitments at this stage. We are going to hear from Alex Neil, the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, at our next meeting in a fortnight's time, which will give us more of an idea of his thoughts and perhaps some indication of what might be in his work programme. We can take it from there.

Jackson Carlaw: As a survivor of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee from the previous session, I believe that if we had not had the election, the committee would probably have wanted to maintain its focus on winter resilience. We took a degree of evidence, but Parliament was dissolved in March and did not sit during April. We are now into June, and we will be off for July and August. By the time we come back in September, we will be heading back into the winter.

It would be useful to flag up the fact that we want to take further evidence on the lessons learned, not just in the aftermath of last winter but subsequently, and on the actions that have been taken, so that we as a committee can be satisfied, in talking to our parliamentary colleagues, that we have learned lessons and that plans have been put in place to deal with the situation should we face a similar winter scenario. The window of time in which to do that is quite limited. If we are going to take evidence and comment on what has been forthcoming, we will have to do so fairly early on when we come back from recess, otherwise we will be back into the winter. Nothing would be more dispiriting for the public than if it seemed that we were still talking about all this in the middle of another event, rather than discussing it in advance.

The Convener: That is a good point. We could get in transport authorities, folk from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Keith Brown, the Minister for Housing and Transport.

Jackson Carlaw: I understand that there was a conference on winter resilience last week—a member of staff in my office was at it. There might be some useful contacts from that conference, and we might want to take as evidence some of the presentations that were made at it. We cannot take long to do further work on winter resilience,

but it would be useful for us to follow up on the issue.

Malcolm Chisholm: We can perhaps tease this out when the cabinet secretary comes to the committee, but I just want to clarify in my own mind the remit and focus of the committee. I am not saying that winter resilience is not a good thing to study, but I suppose that the committee could quite easily become focused solely on transport and housing, because those are the two main substantive policy areas within the cabinet secretary's remit. We could add water to that—and, no doubt, other things if we thought about it—but transport and housing are the big issues that people are thinking about.

However, the cabinet secretary's portfolio covers capital investment more generally. The Scottish Futures Trust relates to health and education as much as it does to transport and housing. I suppose that it is up to us to decide what the committee's focus will be but, as well as specific policy areas, we have to think about the wider issue of capital investment, which I imagine is the primary reason for creating the new Cabinet post.

The other anomaly—which we probably cannot do anything about, although we can still ask about it—is why we are shadowing all of the cabinet secretary's remit apart from regeneration. Obviously, somebody else has made that decision, but I just wonder about it. The simplest thing for a committee is just to shadow a cabinet secretary, which gives at least a general focus to its work. I am not entirely clear in my own mind about what our particular focus should be.

I would be concerned if we looked just at the detail of housing and transport, rather than the wider investment issues.

The Convener: Yes. One of my initial thoughts on hearing that I was being lined up to be convener of this committee was that I would need to get my head around the Scottish Futures Trust as well as the various methods of financing. Although we will probably not have an away day as such, having a business planning day at the end of the summer will mean that we can learn some lessons on the various methods of financing.

You raise another interesting point. As a Government and as a Parliament, we have tried to get people to come out of their silos. I do not think that committees should be seen as silos. There might well be aspects of regeneration on which we should work across committees.

Adam Ingram: Correct me if I am wrong, but I think that fuel poverty is in the cabinet secretary's remit. Given the concerns about fuel costs and electricity charges, I suggest that we need to examine all of those issues urgently. I hope that

we can make an early start on that issue, which is of the moment—we need to get stuck into it.

Meeting closed at 10:13.

Jamie Hepburn: The points that Adam Ingram and Jackson Carlaw raise are well made and concern important issues that we should consider, but I will not be too prescriptive today about what should be in our work programme. I back up Malcolm Chisholm's point that we need to get our heads around exactly where the brief is going.

The brief for the cabinet secretary and therefore the committee is rather wide ranging. Malcolm Chisholm said that regeneration should perhaps be in the committee's remit, but I am glad that it is not, given the number of subjects that we must consider. We will probably have to speak to Alex Neil the week after next, and I presume that we will agree to that. We will subsequently consider in depth what we want to do in the next year and thereafter. We will have to be careful not to get bogged down in too much—the potential for that exists, given all the different areas. We will have to be focused on what we want to consider.

The Convener: Does anyone else have ideas or contributions? If not, do we agree to invite the cabinet secretary to our next meeting, in a fortnight?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thereafter, perhaps we will have more idea of the issues that he is concentrating on, which will allow us to develop our work programme. That is important for the Scottish Parliament information centre and the clerks. Does everybody know the clerking team? We have Steve Farrell, who is the clerk, along with Lewis McNaughton and Lauren Spaven-Donn. From SPICe, we have Allan Campbell. I welcome the team. We will give everybody the chance to work up papers on specific issues.

It is important that we look at the legacy papers and find issues that we can work on immediately, as has been said, because legislation will take a while to come down the line. We have a window for examining issues in depth, which I hope will equip us to consider legislation more critically.

Do we agree to hold a business planning day towards the end of the summer recess?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The clerks will make arrangements for our next meeting and a relevant work programme paper and will organise a planning day. Unless anyone has anything else to raise at this first meeting, that completes today's business. The committee's next meeting will be on 29 June, when we will hear from the cabinet secretary.

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