



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 14 June 2011

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2011, Session 4

CONVENER

*Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Margaret Burgess (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

*Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP)

*Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Gillian Baxendine

Alison Walker

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Tuesday 14 June 2011

[Nanette Milne *opened the meeting at 15:30*]

Interests

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Welcome to the first meeting of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in the fourth session of the Parliament. I remind all those present that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be switched off and not just put on silent, because even on silent they can interfere with the sound system.

The first item on the agenda 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 any interests that are relevant to the remit of the committee and I remind members that any declaration should be brief but sufficiently detailed to make clear to any listener the nature of the interest.

I will start and then we will go round the table. I have no interests to declare that are relevant to the operation of the committee, other than those that are in my entry in the register of members' interests.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I am in a similar position, as I have registered my main interests in the register of interests, but I will run through them very quickly for clarity. I am a vice-president of the United Kingdom Trading Standards Institute. My voluntary interests are that I am a member of the GMB union, An Comunn Gàidhealach, Inverness Credit Union, the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Church of Scotland, Oxfam, Christian Aid, Marie Curie Cancer Care, Save the Children, Compassion UK, Smile Train and the Co-operative Group.

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I, too, have already registered my interests with the clerks to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I highlight for the committee and for any other listeners that I have property interests. I doubt whether they would ever be relevant to the committee, but for the purpose of absolute transparency I state them publicly today. In terms of voluntary interests, in addition to the voluntary registration of property, I want to say that I am honorary president of a fundraising committee to build a church in Bulgaria and that I have added to my register the fact that, like the

convener—although he is not the convener yet—I am a member of the GMB, which is a fine union. I am also a member of the Co-operative Party, the Fabian Society and one other organisation, which will come back to me—I am sure that it is not too important that I mention it now.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I do not believe that there is anything that I need to register at this meeting, but to err on the side of caution I will mention a couple of organisations of which I am a member. I am a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland, which is, of course, just as good as the GMB. It is important that I say that on the record—not that it is as good as the GMB, but that I am a member of it. I am also registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland.

Margaret Burgess (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Like my colleagues, I do not think that I have any interests relevant to this particular committee, but for clarity I point out that I am a director and company secretary—purely in a voluntary capacity—of East Ayrshire Citizens Advice Bureau. I was previously a manager of East Ayrshire Citizens Advice Bureau and any remuneration was on the basis of being a manager. On a voluntary basis, I am a member of the trade union Unite, I have a long-standing involvement with the citizens advice service and I was previously a director of Citizens Advice Scotland.

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I do not think that I have anything to add either, but I will go through what I have registered. I am still a councillor in North Ayrshire and I am a member of Unison. I have a property in Irvine that is not my principal home and I am a director of North Ayrshire CCTV Ltd.

Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP): Like others, I do not have an extensive list of interests that I should declare at this meeting—everything is contained in my entry in the register of interests—but I should put on record the fact that I am still self-employed as a consultant providing education and economic consultancy services for a range of private sector and public sector organisations. I will do that until I complete the projects that I inherited before I was elected—I do not foresee that lasting beyond the recess. I direct people to my entry in the register of interests in respect of potential conflicts with overseeing public appointments, as I have worked as a consultant for a number of public sector organisations, including the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Careers Scotland, Skills Development Scotland, National Museums of Scotland and three local authorities—City of Edinburgh Council, East Renfrewshire Council and

Fife Council. At this stage, I do not see any other potential conflicts of interest.

Convener

15:35

Nanette Milne: Item 2 is choosing a convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as convener of this committee. That being the case, I seek nominations for the position of convener.

Bob Doris: I nominate Dave Thompson.

Dave Thompson was chosen as convener.

Nanette Milne: Congratulations, Dave. Enjoy your work as convener of the committee.

The Convener (Dave Thompson): I thank all members of the committee for electing me convener.

Deputy Convener

15:36

The Convener: Item 3 is choosing a deputy convener. The Parliament has agreed that members of the Scottish Labour Party are eligible to be chosen as deputy convener. That being the case, I invite nominations for the position of deputy convener.

Margaret McDougall: I nominate Helen Eadie.

Helen Eadie was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: Congratulations, Helen.

Helen Eadie: Thank you.

Work Programme

15:37

The Convener: Under item 4, we will consider our approach to our work programme. Members have before them paper 3, which includes the previous Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's legacy paper. I do not think that we intend to have a full discussion on the forward work programme today, but it would be helpful to have a look at the legacy paper and to get members' thoughts on it and any ideas for future work. That will allow us to think about a future business planning meeting and it will allow the clerks and Scottish Parliament information centre staff to bring forward further information on the topics that we highlight for our next meeting.

Do members have any views on the legacy paper and other matters?

Bob Doris: I see that in paragraph 17 of the legacy paper there is a recommendation that, after 12 years, the fourth session would be an appropriate time to review the overall structure of the Parliament's committees. I noticed that the Cabinet Secretary for Parliament and Government Strategy has made some proposals for parliamentary reform, too. Might that whole parliamentary reform process form a body of work in the months ahead? It seems fairly topical and pertinent.

The Convener: That is a fair point. Do other members have any views on that? Two or three items in the legacy paper fall under that sort of heading: parliamentary time—which is mentioned on page 4—the election of committee members and conveners, and the committee structure all relate to that area. There are a number of other items in the paper, too. Would members be happy to take forward work in that area?

Helen Eadie: I am quite happy to sign up to a business planning meeting. I hope that, if it goes ahead, it takes place towards the end of August or the beginning of September. In the past, it has been difficult for people to get those meetings into their diaries. If people have a broad idea of when that work might be done, it will give them an idea of when they can go away on holiday without missing the business planning meeting.

Like others, I acknowledge that the paper from the previous committee members and clerks is a good and earnest piece of work. I note that some of it could be controversial. Nevertheless, it is good to have it. I guess that the big issue that we face is prioritisation. All of the issues are important, but we must decide which ones are also urgent. At the business planning meeting, we

might be able to get some understanding from the committee clerks about what is most urgent.

I was particularly interested in the information on the Scottish Law Commission. I was aware that there was an issue with the Law Commission preparing reports on changes to legislation that were not then taken forward. Perhaps that offers a pool of opportunities from which new members—or perhaps old members who have not yet taken a member's bill through Parliament—can draw to secure their claim to fame, in tandem with the Law Commission, if the Government is unable to take that work forward itself due to the legislative timetable. That is quite appealing.

Nanette Milne: As a previous member of the committee, I endorse what Helen Eadie says about the need to plan the work that is ahead of us. The session could be quite busy. The legacy paper contains a lot of meaty issues and, as Helen Eadie says, prioritisation will be important. We can discuss that in more depth at the business planning meeting.

The Convener: I agree. I have had a look through the legacy paper and can see a number of items that we will have to deal with. The Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 will be affected by the passage of the Scotland Bill, as will the Parliament's standing orders, so we will have to deal with those issues. However, those items of work will likely not come to us until the end of this year or the start of next year, due to the timetabling of the Scotland Bill.

Some of the other items are not particularly urgent. There will not be another census for 10 years, so we do not desperately need to deal with the census order in the next few weeks. The cross-party groups issue is probably not urgent either. The issue of directions to the Public Standards Commissioner for Scotland is probably quite straightforward and could be handled fairly quickly. Again, we can tease that out at the business planning meeting, but we would probably want to handle that issue fairly soon. As Helen Eadie mentioned, we need to consider the Law Commission reports issue. We will need some clarification on the Lisbon treaty and European scrutiny issue. I would be interested to know the outcome of the relevant pilot before we take that issue forward.

15:45

Two bigger items are raised in the paper. The first is on broad parliamentary reform issues and issues to do with how the Parliament operates. I read the Cabinet Secretary for Parliament and Government Strategy's proposals at the weekend, and it is obvious that he is looking for a debate on

those issues. The second bigger item is to do with public appointments.

We do not need to make decisions on those today, as we can consider the issues at our next meeting and at the business planning meeting. However, we will probably want to follow up the public appointments issue. On parliamentary reform, I know that, in the past when such reform has been considered, the process has stretched over a long period, sometimes years. I am keen to do some work on that, but I want to do it relatively quickly in a relatively short period, if members are happy with that. We can tease that out at the business planning meeting. Because some of the other issues will not come to us until much later in the year or early next year, we might have a wee bit of a gap between September and November during which we can focus, do a good bit of work and try to complete it in a relatively short timescale. Those are just my general views, which we can pick up on later.

Nanette Milne: I agree with you on that, convener.

I accept that the cross-party groups are probably not urgent, but there were issues with them in the previous session of Parliament. Issues arose about the large number of groups and whether they were properly supported by the MSPs who were members of them. It would be of merit to consider fairly early on in this session the issues about the functioning of cross-party groups. The groups seem to be reconvening thick and fast.

The Convener: Indeed they are. There are plenty of them.

Do members have any other comments?

Bob Doris: I want to ask about a housekeeping issue. On parliamentary reform, we will want to engage as widely as possible with civic Scotland on how Parliament should adapt. Will the planning meeting be before the summer recess or during it? If there is a call for evidence, we will want it to go out at the earliest possible opportunity to give the maximum amount of time for people to respond. If the call goes out during recess, people might not be watching as closely as they otherwise would be. I just want to get an idea of how early we will move on that.

The Convener: Perhaps the clerks can advise us on that. If we agree in principle to consider parliamentary reform, perhaps it would be useful to have a paper at the next meeting outlining some of the issues. This depends on exactly what we decide to do, but if we are to put out a request for comments from wider society and we hope to begin working in earnest in September, it would be useful to get as much feedback as possible before then. I ask the clerks to have a think about that.

We can discuss the issue and come back with details.

Gillian Baxendine (Clerk): Yes, that is fine.

Bob Doris: That is helpful.

The Convener: If there are no other points, I take it that the committee is happy to have a business planning meeting. We will try to organise it for during the recess. The recommendation is that the organisation be delegated to the clerks and me. I will speak to the deputy convener and other members so that we get a date that suits everybody. The meeting will allow us to go into the issues in depth. We should consider getting various people who are on the outside and who watch what we do—Parliament watchers, if you like—to speak to us about the parliamentary reform agenda. We should not keep the issue to ourselves, as it is not just for us. We need to get a journalist or two and some of the academics who watch Parliament to come along and comment and criticise at the business planning day. Do members agree to hold that meeting at a date to be decided later?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That completes today's business. The committee's next meeting will be on 28 June. I thank members for attending.

Meeting closed at 15:50.

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