



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Thursday 8 November 2012



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**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>INTERESTS.....</b>	<b>501</b>
<b>DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE .....</b>	<b>502</b>
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE .....</b>	<b>503</b>

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**STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE**  
**14<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2012, Session 4**

**CONVENER**

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

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Brian Adam (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

\*John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

\*Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP)

\*Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)

\*Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES**

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)

David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con)

\*attended

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Gillian Baxendine

Alison Walker

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 6



## Scottish Parliament

### Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

*Thursday 8 November 2012*

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

#### Interests

**The Convener (Dave Thompson):** Good morning, members. It is a lovely day out there. It is beautiful and sunny and bright and dry, which is fantastic. Welcome to the 14th meeting in 2012 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I remind members to turn off mobile phones and BlackBerrys.

I will pause for a moment to let Helen Eadie take her seat.

**Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):** I apologise, convener.

**The Convener:** Welcome to the meeting.

The first item on our agenda is for our new member, Richard Lyle, who is known as Dick Lyle, to declare any relevant interests. Before he does so, I thank John Mason for his time on the committee. It was short, but he was very effective. John performed well.

I welcome Richard to his first meeting of the committee and ask him to declare any relevant interests.

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Thank you, convener. I have no interests that I think I need to declare.

**The Convener:** Thank you.

## Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:31

**The Convener:** Item 2 is for the committee to decide whether to take in private item 4, which is consideration of how to amend standing orders to take account of changes to the rules on Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body membership under the Scotland Act 2012. Do members have any comments?

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** I do not see any reason to take the item in private, but I am happy to accept the recommendation.

**The Convener:** As there are no other comments, are members happy to take the item in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Thank you.

## Social Media Guidance

09:32

**The Convener:** Item 3 is consideration of the provision of guidance to members on use of social media, for inclusion in volume 3 of the “Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament”. Members have a paper on the draft guidance. Are there any comments?

**Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I have a minor comment. The draft guidance uses the words “in ‘real time’”. I wonder whether that implies that members may tweet during meetings.

**The Convener:** Where is that?

**Fiona McLeod:** It is under the heading “Confidentiality requirements”.

**The Convener:** Oh, yes. I suppose that it could be taken to mean that, but I am not sure. Is it not more a statement of fact? The draft guidance states:

“Social media allows MSPs to provide information ... in ‘real time’.”

It does not state that we will allow them to do that.

**Fiona McLeod:** My concern is about the next sentence, which is:

“This could include information about discussions at committee meetings.”

The draft guidance’s use of the phrase “in ‘real time’” implies that members may tweet while a committee discussion is continuing. Can we tighten up the language so that it is clear that we do not expect any member to be tweeting in real time?

**The Convener:** The clerk is checking the guidance in the Presiding Officer’s letter of 20 March to see what it says about that.

What do members think we should do? Should we change the wording? Do you have a suggestion, Fiona?

**Fiona McLeod:** I have not worked out any suggested wording. Perhaps the guidance could state:

“Social media have the provision to allow MSPs to provide information about their parliamentary work in ‘real time’.”

It could then refer to the letter from the Presiding Officer and state that

“It is not expected that tweeting will happen during sessions of Parliament.”

**John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I think that that is caught by the first paragraph under “Section 7: General

Conduct”, which is headed, “Conduct in the Chamber and in Committee”.

It states that, notwithstanding what is said elsewhere, we are all bound by what the Presiding Officer has said about tweeting in the chamber and in committee. I would be wary about overcomplicating that paragraph.

**The Convener:** I will read the relevant part of the letter that we received from the Presiding Officer in March. Under “Use of electronic tablet devices in the Chamber” it states:

“I am happy to confirm that Members should be allowed to use electronic tablet devices, as an alternative to paper notes for speaking in the Chamber.

As we discussed, any Members now choosing to do so should continue to conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner. I do not consider that using electronic devices for other purposes during parliamentary proceedings, particularly the use of social networking sites, is compatible with that requirement of conduct.”

That is a pretty clear steer, certainly in relation to the chamber, but I think that we would look to interpret “parliamentary proceedings” as including committees. The letter is therefore a clear steer to conveners as well.

I think that John Lamont is right. With the word “Parliament” at the top, backed up with the Presiding Officer’s letter, it should be pretty clear.

**Richard Lyle:** I can see the point that Fiona McLeod is getting at. If we take out the words “in ‘real time’”, the guidance will read:

“Social media allows MSPs to provide information about their parliamentary work. This could include information about discussions at committee meetings.”

There will then be no ambiguity.

**The Convener:** What do members think about that?

**Helen Eadie:** That is fine.

**The Convener:** Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Okay—let us do that. Deletion of the offending words will deal with the issue. Are members happy with that?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Thank you. Members might wish to note that the content of volume 3, which the guidance will go into, is a matter for the committee, so it does not require parliamentary approval for it to be put in place. The guidance can now be included in volume 3 and will be effective as soon as it is there.

That ends the public part of our meeting.

09:37

*Meeting continued in private until 09:59.*

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