



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

REFERENDUM (SCOTLAND) BILL COMMITTEE

Thursday 25 October 2012

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REFERENDUM (SCOTLAND) BILL COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2012, Session 4

CONVENER

*Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

*Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP)

*Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)

*Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

*Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con)

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

*Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Andrew Mylne

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee

Thursday 25 October 2012

[Rob Gibson opened the meeting at 10:00]

Interests

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Good morning, and welcome to this historic occasion: the first meeting of the new Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee, in the fourth session of the Scottish Parliament.

I remind all members that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be switched off, as they can interfere with the sound system even when they are on silent.

I have received no apologies, and as the oldest member I will conduct this part of the business. We will go round all the members to find out whether they have any interests to declare.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I have no interests to declare.

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): I have no interests to declare.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I have no interests to declare.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): We are a very boring lot. I have no interests to declare.

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): Yes—I am not aware of any interests that I need to declare.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am not of the view that I have any relevant registrable interests to declare, but for the sake of completeness I will mention that I am a member of the Law Society of Scotland and hold a current practising certificate.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I have no interests to declare.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I have no interests to declare.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I have no interests to declare.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I have no interests to declare.

Rob Gibson: And I have no interests to declare, so we have no interests to declare.

Convener

10:01

Rob Gibson: Our second item is to choose a convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as convener of the committee. I am pleased to announce that Bruce Crawford is the SNP's nominee for the post. I ask members to agree to choose Bruce Crawford as our new convener.

Bruce Crawford was chosen as convener.

Annabel Goldie: Did the SNP members have a say in that? [*Laughter.*]

Rob Gibson: I assume that that is so. I congratulate Bruce Crawford; he will take over the role now, so we will swap places.

The Convener (Bruce Crawford): It is an honour and a privilege to be asked to chair the Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee. It is a very important committee, as I think we all know and as the nature of its membership demonstrates. I am grateful to all the parties for ensuring that we have the right people on the committee to undertake the task that lies ahead of us.

I thank the young man who undertook the business at the beginning of the meeting. I also thank the clerks, because they were asked to undertake a very quick task in setting up today's meeting and getting the papers out in such short order. I am very grateful to them.

Deputy Convener

10:02

The Convener: The third item on our agenda is to choose a deputy convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Labour Party are eligible for nomination as deputy convener of the committee, and I understand that James Kelly is the Labour Party's nominee for the post. I therefore ask members to agree to choose James Kelly as our deputy convener.

James Kelly was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: I congratulate James Kelly on his appointment, and I look forward to working with him as I do with all the other members of the committee.

Work Programme

10:03

The Convener: Item 4 is a preliminary discussion about our work programme. Again, I am grateful to the clerks for preparing the paper at such short notice. It outlines the main tasks that the committee will need to undertake in the coming period, sets out the timescales for some of the legislation that we will need to consider, and outlines some of the things that we need to discuss in more detail. It draws attention, at paragraph 10, to the time limits that are on us and to the fact that we need to complete the work on the Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2013—the section 30 order—and report to Parliament by Friday 30 November.

The paper asks us to consider a number of matters at the next meeting, including the number of meetings that we think will be required, the oral and written evidence that we think that we should invite, and the background information that we think it would be appropriate to request from the Scottish Parliament information centre, the clerks or other sources.

Given the timescales that we face, it would be a good starting point for the committee not to wait until next week but to agree today that we should approach the appropriate ministers and probably the Deputy First Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland to come along to give evidence to the committee at the appropriate juncture. Because of the ministers' busy diaries, it is important that we get that bit of work under way.

I had a chat with James Kelly before the meeting, and he rightly suggested that we might want to make the call for written evidence today. That would enable us in the short term to receive submissions, which would allow us to decide which witnesses might appear before us.

Because of the nature of the issue, academics in particular might be interested. Asking for written evidence and seeing what we get will give us a range of people who might be prepared to come along and give evidence before we reach the stage of having to agree—or otherwise—the order.

I throw that out to committee members and ask for their views. Any views on the type of people who we might ask along—and their background and nature—would be useful and would give the clerks some guidance.

Annabel Goldie: I am perfectly happy with that proposal in principle. I assume that the call for evidence, whether written or oral, will make clear that we are inviting comment specifically on the

order. If not, we will be avalanched by a cascade of views.

The Convener: In the first instance, we should concentrate on the section 30 order. We will have a bit more time to deal with the referendum stuff later.

The next matter is to decide on the date of the next meeting. From what we have seen of the parliamentary calendar, the most intense activity around committees is on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, so it looks as if Thursday will be the best slot in which to hold this committee, if members are content with that.

There may be occasions, depending on our workload later on, when we might have to meet earlier than 10 o'clock in the morning to ensure that we get all the work completed in time. If members are happy with that, we will proceed on that basis. Are members agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I thank the members of the committee for being here today, and I look forward to seeing you all next week.

Annabel Goldie: Just to clarify, do we anticipate regular Thursday morning meetings for this committee?

The Convener: Certainly until the end of November. There might be a wee gap then, but we might be getting early work on the referendum.

Annabel Goldie: Thank you—that is helpful.

The Convener: Thank you; I am grateful to you all.

Meeting closed at 10:07.

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