



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Thursday 21 November 2013

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
15th Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con)

*Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Gillian Baxendine

Alison Walker

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 21 November 2013

[Fiona McLeod opened the meeting at 09:30]

Interests

The Temporary Convener (Fiona McLeod):

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the 15th meeting in 2013 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I remind members to turn off mobile phones and BlackBerrys. We await Margaret McDougall and Cameron Buchanan, but will press ahead.

As members are all aware, very sadly our deputy convener Helen Eadie died on 9 November. Yesterday, the Parliament commemorated Helen's life in a motion of condolence. I think that it would be appropriate for our committee also to send our thoughts to Helen's family.

I welcome Mark Griffin, who is attending today as the Labour Party substitute.

Agenda item 1 is to invite the new member of the committee to declare any relevant interests. Stewart Stevenson is replacing Dave Thompson, who was our convener. Dave has made the difficult decision to resign from the committee. Again, I think that it would be appropriate, as I am sure all committee members would agree, to record our thanks to Dave for his work on the committee, especially as our convener.

I welcome Stewart Stevenson to the committee and invite him to declare any relevant interests.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Convener, I have nothing to declare beyond what is in my formal entry in the register of interests.

Convener

09:31

The Temporary Convener: Agenda item 2 is to choose a new convener for the committee. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination. That being the case, I seek nominations for the position of convener.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I nominate Stewart Stevenson.

The Temporary Convener: Mark Griffin has nominated Stewart Stevenson. I ask the committee to agree that Stewart Stevenson be chosen as convener of the committee.

Stewart Stevenson was chosen as convener.

The Temporary Convener: I congratulate Stewart Stevenson on his appointment, and welcome him to the chair for the rest of this meeting and for the rest of our committee meetings.

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): I apologise for being late. The lift is broken, so it is very difficult to get up here.

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): Good morning. I, too, am sorry that I am late.

The Convener (Stewart Stevenson): I thank committee members for choosing me as convener; I am very happy to be here. Having previously served on the committee for a brief period, I have some familiarity with it.

I start by thanking Fiona McLeod for her time as temporary convener of the committee. The committee has been through a slightly difficult time and I know that Fiona McLeod's experience and skill in chairing the committee have kept things moving appropriately.

Decisions on Taking Business in Private

09:34

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is to ask the committee to decide whether to take in private agenda item 6, which is to allow the committee to review its work programme. Do members agree?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is to ask the committee to decide whether to take future items in private. The first is a draft report on the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer elections, and the second is a response from the Public Audit Committee on Scottish Public Services Ombudsman special reports. Are members agreed that those items be taken in private at future meetings?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Cross-party Groups

09:35

The Convener: Agenda item 5 is the committee's second monitoring report on the activities of cross-party groups. As members will see, paper 1 demonstrates that the new monitoring system for CPGs is now a much more robust process. The vast majority of CPGs now routinely provide more detailed information on their activities and finances in annual returns to Parliament. There are still a few groups that are not providing the information or are not meeting at least twice a year. Today, we have an opportunity to reflect on what further action is required at this stage.

Annex B of paper 1 provides details of meetings that have been held by groups, including annual general meetings. As detailed in the annex, a few groups have not done one or more of the following: notified the clerks 10 days in advance of holding a meeting; held an AGM within the required timescale; or had a meeting for more than a year.

It is worth updating the committee on the following points. The cross-party group on golf now has a second meeting scheduled for 10 December. The cross-party group on Poland has contacted the clerks to confirm that it has met on three other occasions—the clerks have reminded the group that it is required to provide 10 days' notice of all meetings. The cross-party group on Russia now has a meeting scheduled for 19 November, and the cross-party group on video games technology now has a meeting scheduled for 11 December.

Does the committee wish to take any action in relation to any of those groups? We might wish to write to the conveners of those groups to request explanations. Would that be an appropriate step?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I am seeing nodding heads. Unless anyone is otherwise minded, we shall write to those groups.

The committee also wished to review the new registration form, which members can see at annex C of paper 1. Does anyone wish to say anything about the registration form?

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): On page 11 of paper 1, some of the boxes in the cross-party group registration form are quite small. Being someone who writes quite large, I suggest that the boxes could be slightly expanded.

The Convener: I am advised that, because the form will be made available as a Word document,

the space will expand as required. The assumption is that the form will be filled out electronically.

Richard Lyle: That was my point. If you fill out the form electronically, the box will expand, but if you fill it out on paper, the box is too small.

The Convener: That point is duly noted.

It has been drawn to my attention that a number of cross-party groups have not met since the changes came into effect, so we should perhaps note that. The cross-party group on dementia last met on 8 February last year—although the group is now doing something about that—the cross-party group on Russia last met in November last year, and the cross-party group on the Scots language last met in December last year. The cross-party groups on cancer, disability, digital participation, human trafficking and Palestine have met, but have not provided notification of their meetings. We will also write to all those groups, if members are content with that.

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): On the cross-party group on the Scots language, paper 1 says:

“The Convener of that Group has advised ... it has been in abeyance since December 2012.”

I seem to remember that we had a discussion about another cross-party group that said that it was in abeyance. I do not remember what the outcome was, or whether we decided what “in abeyance” means.

The Convener: I am advised that the cross-party group on beer previously said that it was in abeyance, but it has subsequently been disbanded. That, I suppose, opens up the question what “in abeyance” means, because I do not think that we formally recognise the term. Groups either meet the requirements or they do not.

Fiona McLeod: Now that you have reminded me, I think that we wrote to the cross-party group on beer to say that it could not be “in abeyance” and that it had to make a decision. Should we do the same with the cross-party group on the Scots language, given that we have asked it twice to hold an AGM and it has not done so?

The Convener: We have agreed that we will write to the groups. In what we write, we will reflect what Fiona McLeod has suggested.

Are there any other matters on the cross-party group registration form? Are we content to note what Richard Lyle has said?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Annex D of paper 1 contains data protection guidance, which has been provided by the Parliament’s head of information

governance. The guidance is published on the Parliament’s intranet and is available to all MSPs. Do members wish to note the guidance at annex D and agree that it should be sent to all groups?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I see nodding heads, so that is agreed.

That brings us to the conclusion of the public part of the meeting.

09:40

Meeting continued in private until 10:09.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78392-157-7

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78392-170-6

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland
