



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Thursday 26 February 2015

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
4th Meeting 2015, Session 4

CONVENER

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

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con)

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

*Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

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

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Roz Thomson (Clerk)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 26 February 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:34]

Guidance on Supporting Constituents

The Convener (Stewart Stevenson): I welcome members to the fourth meeting of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in 2015. I remind everyone to switch off mobile phones as they can affect the broadcasting system.

The first item on our agenda today is for members to consider some guidance on supporting constituents and to consider whether a reference to equalities considerations should be added to the “Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament”. Does anyone wish to comment?

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I am not trying to be picky—I understand why the proposed addition to the guidance has been produced and I think it is right—but constituents will not always declare that they have a mental health issue, and sometimes it is the people who either do not want to tell us, or have not been diagnosed, who are most difficult to help.

I wonder whether we need to say something about a scenario where a member suspects that there may be a problem of that kind. It is not just about people with mental health problems; I can think of a whole range of things where we may have to stop and think about whether our approach is absolutely the right and most helpful one in the circumstances. I wonder whether we need some acknowledgement of that difficulty.

Roz Thomson (Clerk): The further guidance that is mentioned in the addition to the code of conduct that is proposed to the committee tries to cover those sensitivities as far as is useful. There is a section about trying to recognise different forms of disorder and a section called

“How can I suggest to a constituent that they need help with their mental health?”

It covers sensitive situations such as that. It might be that some more of that information could be covered in the proposed addition to volume 3, which is in paper 1.

Patricia Ferguson: If there is at least a link or the matter is referred to in some way, that will be helpful.

Roz Thomson: We can certainly add that in.

The Convener: I have been referred on a previous occasion by a constituent with severe mental health problems, and in relation to this individual two other MSPs have also been referred, but in each case the clerks have, on behalf of the committee at the time, been quite clear. The issue also arises of the safety of members and our staff—although this is not the proper place to make reference to that—because some mental health issues can be severe enough that that is an issue.

At the end of the day, we have to judge it as we see it and be aware that we have places where we can go for assistance on the matter. That is really what it is about, but I think that what Patricia Ferguson said is helpful and we will take account of it.

Is the committee content that I agree changes in the light of those remarks and that we proceed from there?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you. We are agreed to the wording, subject to that.

That ends the public part of the meeting.

09:38

Meeting continued in private until 11:16.

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