



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 18 May 2023

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
10th Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 18 May 2023

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Martin Whitfield): Good morning, and welcome to the 10th meeting in 2023 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. The committee has received apologies from Edward Mountain MSP.

Our first agenda item is a decision on whether to take business in private. Does the committee agree to take in private, at a future meeting, consideration of revisions to the guidance on the code of conduct for MSPs and consideration of its approach to petition PE1949, which calls for a review of the rules concerning dual mandate MSPs?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annual Report

09:30

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of the draft annual report for the parliamentary year from 13 May 2022 to 12 May 2023, which will be published in due course. Do any members have comments on the report?

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am relatively new to the committee, but it is really nice to read a short report.

The Convener: I am glad that you have found it useful as a synopsis of the committee's work prior to your joining us—and your joining us is most welcome. It is an interesting snapshot of the work that the committee has covered in the past year. In particular, the report of our inquiry into future parliamentary procedures and practices was the starting point for—the genesis of—our work in that year.

It is worth pointing out that the report features, as did much of our discussion, the iterative nature of change—that we should never consider the Parliament to be fixed; it is always on a journey of improvement. Some of that might go down the odd cul-de-sac, but there is no harm in learning from mistakes, whereas there is harm in trying to fix everything in aspic and in saying that we are successful because of that. Thank you for that, Emma.

Are there any other comments?

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I will be brief, convener. I thank the clerking team for producing the report and supporting our meetings over the past year.

I commend Emma Harper's observation about the brevity of the report. That brevity means that the report talks in broad brush strokes but does not necessarily give the full details of what has been looked at. I know that we will come to those matters in our work programme at some point later in the year.

One aspect of the iterative nature of parliamentary reform that has been alluded to in the past is about making this place more family friendly. I am minded to put on the record again that there is still no appropriate childcare facility or crèche that would allow members to be here instead of having to work remotely or be elsewhere. That applies not just to members but to staff, who are just as important in supporting the Parliament. Maybe that is a bit of joint work for the future. I mention that merely because it will not be in our brief and concise annual report. However, we can expand on it a little more in a meeting, so I

put that on the record and hope that we return to it.

The Convener: That is helpful. The question of crèche and care facilities in the Parliament has been raised by a number of members in a number of different venues. I know that they—and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body—will hear your point, and they can be confident that we will return to the issue in a positive way, I hope, with suggestions for improvements and the facilitation of care.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I agree that it is good to have a report that summarises where we are and that does not go into too much detail. It is an important report because it clarifies many areas that we have considered and some that we are continuing to consider.

It is always good to revise and review, which is exactly what we try to do. We have had a number of opportunities to look at the code and at what might be improved or considered. That is still very much where we are. We have not got it right in all aspects—we know that—but we are prepared and willing to test the water and find out where we should go. That comes through fully in the report.

For example, we have brought in proxy voting and ideas about situations in which it might apply. That is all to the benefit not just of the Parliament but of its members. The committee is here to support and protect the members but also to scrutinise them, which is exactly what it does. The report gives that information.

The Convener: That is helpful.

Before I formally invite the committee to agree to the publication of the report, I echo Bob Doris's comments about the support that we have from the clerking team, as well as from the Scottish Parliament information centre and the people outwith the Parliament who have supported us in evidence sessions by bringing their knowledge. That has been incredibly helpful. On the formal record, I thank them all.

With that, is the committee happy for the report to be published?

Members indicated agreement.

09:35

Meeting continued in private until 10:21.

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