



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 11 November 2021

Session 6



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Thursday 11 November 2021

CONTENTS

DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	Col. 1
CROSS-PARTY GROUPS.....	2

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
7th Meeting 2021, Session 6

CONVENER

*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP)

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con)

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 11 November 2021

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:04]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Martin Whitfield): Good morning, and welcome to the seventh meeting in session 6 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

Agenda item 1 is for the committee to decide whether it agrees to take in private item 5, which is consideration of our work programme. Are members happy to take that item in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-Party Groups

09:05

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of proposed cross-party groups, the first of which is a proposed CPG on the creative economy. I welcome the proposed group's convener, Claire Baker, and invite her to make a short statement about the intentions behind it.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Good morning. The previous CPG on culture, which was established in 2013 and ran over two sessions, was well subscribed and well attended. However, over time, we found that the wide range of areas that is covered by the term "culture" created some challenges when it came to the group's ability to represent the breadth of groups in the sector, which includes the arts, screen, heritage and creative industries.

I acknowledge that there are concerns about the existence of a large number of CPGs and the pressure that that puts on MSP attendance. To avoid creating CPGs that are too specific, we propose to separate into two distinct groups, with the first being based around publicly funded culture, such as libraries, museums and national performing companies. I understand that the committee took evidence on that last week from Sarah Boyack. The other group, which I am proposing this morning, will be based around the industrial sector or the creative economy, including publishing companies, record companies, entrepreneurs and so on—that is, the more commercial end of the sector. That arrangement will allow MSPs and those who are in the sector to have sufficient focus across both areas. There may be some crossover when it comes to membership, but each group will have a distinct focus that will be reflected in its membership and activities.

The creative sector is of huge importance to Scotland's economy. It involves more than 15,000 businesses that employ more than 70,000 people, in addition to many freelancers. Our creative industries contribute some £5 billion to the economy each year, and there are huge opportunities for increased productivity and growth. It is a sector that has been seriously impacted by the pandemic and, as we emerge from that, there is a real need to focus particularly on its recovery in the short and the long term. I believe that there is value in establishing the proposed CPG, in order to advance the addressing of those concerns.

I welcome the fact that the committee previously agreed to the formation of the group on culture

and communities, and I hope that it will be able to support the group that I propose.

The Convener: Thank you very much, Claire. I invite questions from committee members.

No one has indicated they have any questions.

As you said, we met the proposed CPG on culture and communities last week. The idea of such a wide area as culture being subdivided is interesting. Do you have any fears about that separation, or are you content that the idea of separating into two areas—of having two groups of voices within culture—will perhaps allow MSPs to hear from people they have not previously been able to hear from?

Claire Baker: That is the intention. When there was one group, we found that the sector was so broad that we could have subdivided it into 20 CPGs. However, we recognise that culture has a more creative community and public sector-focused end, as well as a more commercial and industrial side. That mirrors the Scottish Government's approach—it has separate departments for the creative industries and for culture.

We feel that having two groups will give enough space in meetings for engagement with MSPs and will allow them to look at both sides of culture. However, we propose to work closely together. Rather than each group having four meetings a year, the initial proposal is to have two each. There is some crossover in membership, but some membership is exclusive—some people have a particular interest in one angle or the other.

The Convener: That is very helpful. Thank you for recognising the fact that there are a significant number of CPGs and the workload commitments that that creates for MSPs. It is certainly refreshing to hear that that has been considered through the making of two applications, one of which you have presented today.

The committee will take its decision and the clerks will notify you of that decision in due course. I thank you for coming along this morning, and I wish all its members well with the CPG—if the committee approves the proposal.

I suspend the meeting to allow for a changeover of witnesses.

09:09

Meeting suspended.

09:10

On resuming—

The Convener: The next proposed cross-party group that we will consider is the proposed CPG

on India. I welcome Pam Gosal, the co-convener of the proposed group, and I invite her to make a short statement about its intentions.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): Good morning. The proposed cross-party group on India seeks to promote relationships between Scotland and India. The principal aim of our CPG is to work with organisations and authorities to strengthen cultural, educational and economic ties between our two countries. Given the size of the Indian economy, forging a closer relationship with India has the potential to be extremely beneficial for our society, economy and development. It would be the first CPG focused on India in the history of the Scottish Parliament. Indians and people of Indian heritage who live in Scotland have contributed greatly to our communities, society and culture. Therefore, the CPG on India would provide a great opportunity to promote our common interests and shared heritage; it would also provide the perfect opportunity for MSPs to meet prominent dignitaries from the Indian community.

I do not expect that the CPG on India would infringe on other groups. I believe that the group would bring great economic and social benefits to Scotland and India, so I hope that the committee agrees to its registration.

I echo what was said earlier about workload. I have taken into account that there are many CPGs and that MSPs have a high workload, but I have also taken into account how important the work of the proposed group is to building our economy after the pandemic. I have cross-party support for the group.

The Convener: Do members have any questions? It seems not.

You have a strong list of cross-party members of the proposed group, but I want to ask about its non-MSP membership. I see that you have the support of the consulate general of India and PG Paper Company Ltd. Will it provide secretariat support?

Pam Gosal: Yes, PG Paper will provide that, and the consulate will provide us with guidance, connections and links for relationship building in the areas of education, culture and trade.

The Convener: The hope is that that will allow you to build on the good intention of allowing access to MSPs and providing them with experience and education with regard to the important country—and, indeed, subcontinent—of India.

Pam Gosal: Absolutely. That has come up in my portfolio in working with universities and colleges. They talk about how we can make Scotland more attractive for bringing in more students from all over the world. Those students,

as you know, are not just students; they bring an exchange of knowledge and technology. It is fantastic for Scotland that we can build such relationships.

The Convener: Thank you very much for coming. As you heard in relation to the previous proposed CPG, the committee clerks will be in touch with you once the committee has taken its decision, which I hope will be a positive one.

Pam Gosal: Thank you.

The Convener: The next proposed group that we will consider is the proposed CPG on a wellbeing economy. I welcome Paul McLennan, who is a member of the committee and the convener of the proposed group, and I ask him to give an explanation of its purpose.

09:15

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Good morning. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I am a serving councillor on East Lothian Council.

The stated purpose of the group is:

"To increase understanding and delivery of a Wellbeing Economy, one which is in service of people and planet and to promote delivery of sustainable, fair and equal economic development, across a range of interest areas public, private and third sector as well as local and national government."

The wellbeing economy involves an overview of various areas including health, equalities, the economy and sustainability. We recognise that there is some crossover with existing CPGs—for example, those on renewable energy and energy efficiency and on carers—and with groups that were proposed at the time that we made the application and that have now been approved, on a circular economy and on health inequalities. I think that we can work in conjunction with those groups, as opposed to competing with them.

More widely, since being elected around six months ago, we have heard many members from all parties say that they want to move towards a wellbeing economy. One of the purposes of the group is to increase understanding of what a wellbeing economy looks like and to help with delivery of that. It is proposed that the group will have a wide range of participants. The Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland will be its secretariat, and our membership will include Scottish Enterprise, United Nations House Scotland and the Scottish Trades Union Congress. Since we submitted the registration form, Queen Margaret University and Public Health Scotland have also joined the group.

I am willing to answer any questions, and I look forward to working with the group.

The Convener: Thank you, Paul. Do members have any questions? It seems not.

I want to pick up on what you said about the definition of a wellbeing economy. It is certainly a phrase that gets bandied around a lot, but, when we start to dig beneath it, people's understanding is very varied and very broad. Given the wide number of non-MSP organisations that are going to be involved, the group certainly seems like a beneficial way of trying to reach consensus on what we mean by "a wellbeing economy" and, more important, of moving forward to reach that goal.

For clarification, when we come to make a decision on the proposed cross-party groups, Paul McLennan will step out of the meeting and will not be part of that process. I thank him for coming along.

We will have a short suspension.

09:17

Meeting suspended.

09:18

On resuming—

The Convener: The final proposed CPG that we will consider today is on social work. I welcome Fulton MacGregor, who is joining us remotely. He is the proposed convener of the group. Would you like to give a short explanation of the intentions of the group, please?

Fulton MacGregor (Scottish Parliament): I declare an interest as a social worker who is registered with the Scottish Social Services Council. Prior to being elected in 2016, I worked as a social worker for around 12 years—first in child care and protection and latterly in community criminal justice social work.

In starting—if you do not mind, convener—I thank Emily Galloway from the Scottish Association of Social Work and Rob Byrne from my office for all their work thus far in bringing the group together.

The main aim of the proposed cross-party group on social work is to promote an understanding of the complexities of the social work profession, to bring together its voices and to positively raise its profile. I believe that the establishment of the group is justified, as social work is a single profession. It is very connected to, but separate from, for example, social care and other health services. Social workers hold specific duties for welfare and have statutory powers to intervene, where necessary, across a range of areas.

As members will be aware, the governance and delivery of social work are spread across local authorities, the independent and third sectors and health and social care partnerships, so it is often challenging to bring those diverse experiences and voices together to support and influence national policy and legislation. That is also shown by the fact that social work is part of a variety of Government portfolios.

In addition, there has been a lack of, or a stereotypical, public understanding of the profession, which is often negatively presented by the media. I ask colleagues to think of the social worker in soap operas who comes into people's houses and threatens to remove their children. In my experience—I am sure that others will agree—that could not be further from reality, but the public sometimes have that perception.

The cross-party group will provide a space in which to address those issues collaboratively and to work towards solutions for people who use social work services—families, communities and social workers themselves. It will also seek to raise awareness of the profession, raise its profile in a positive way and enable the public to understand better the key role that social workers play in people's lives. That role will become even more significant as Scotland moves towards establishing a national care service, in which social work will play an integral part.

Social work is an interconnected profession, so there are some overlaps with existing cross-party groups. I have had a wee look at that. As with the committee structure in Parliament, no one existing cross-party group provides the forum that the creation of the cross-party group seeks. If approved, the cross-party group will consider issues including public perceptions of social work, the national care service, poverty, drug deaths and self-directed support, to name but a few.

The group will be open to members from all parties, and I have already secured cross-party support. I hope to have inspiring speakers attend, and I will invite relevant Government ministers regularly. As I said before, a variety of Government ministers will be able to come along to the group, given what their portfolios cover.

I thank the Scottish Association of Social Work, which has been a driving force in getting to this stage and has agreed to be the secretariat if the group is approved. I assure the committee and the Parliament that SASW would be a thorough and proactive secretariat.

The Convener: Thank you for that full and positive description. Bob, do you have a question.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Thank you, convener, and thanks to Fulton MacGregor for the opening

statement. I dropped my request to speak in the chat box before you had completed your presentation, so you partially answered my question towards the end of your opening statement. I was looking at the range of organisations that have signed up for the proposed cross-party group. They are pretty varied, which made me think that there are lots of different voices in the social work system. That can make it difficult for social work to speak with one voice in relation to policy development; some voices might inadvertently be squeezed out.

You mentioned the drug deaths crisis, the national care service and other active on-going policy areas. Do you think that the cross-party group would contribute to ensuring that the social work community has a strong voice at the heart of those policy developments? I was on the committee that brought self-directed support to Scotland. There is probably a need for some post-legislative scrutiny of it and how it is operating in practice. The group will not be a subject committee of the Parliament, but do you think that there is a role for the cross-party group in teasing out some of the strengths and the areas that need to be improved in relation to self-directed support?

I am sorry for the length of my question. I hope that you see it as a positive question, because I am genuinely interested in the role that the cross-party group could play and I want to give you the chance to put some of that on the record.

Fulton MacGregor: I appreciate the question and I know that Bob Doris has been a supporter of social work and related services throughout his time as an MSP. We have spoken regularly about that. I know that the work that you do is linked very much with social work.

Towards the end of the previous parliamentary session, SASW held some hustings, which I attended on behalf of my party. All the political parties were represented. One of the asks at that hustings, because of the way that the discussion went, was about whether people would commit to the establishment of a cross-party group, should they be re-elected. I committed to that, as did others. That request for a cross-party group came after a full and lengthy discussion about where social work sits in the Parliament.

Bob Doris talked about self-directed support and the drug crisis and, as he said, different social workers would be involved in those areas. As I said in my opening statement, social workers have statutory powers in various areas including children and families, adult justice and adult social care, and it has been difficult to bring voices together.

Social workers have never really had a major voice in the committee structure. Social work

organisations are invited to committees—I am a member of two committees that do that regularly. However, justice social workers come under the Criminal Justice Committee, of which I am a member; children and families social workers are more involved with the Education, Children and Young People Committee; and health and social care social workers are more involved with the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. It has therefore been difficult to bring together a forum to represent the issues and dilemmas that social workers face—in particular, those that they have faced through the pandemic and as we build back from it. The cross-party group offers the opportunity to do that.

The two issues that Bob Doris mentioned will absolutely be at the forefront. SASW representatives are probably watching this meeting and hoping that the cross-party group will be approved, and they are probably already thinking about how those two issues can become future agenda items. All members, whether or not they are members of the group, would be welcome to come to any meeting.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): I notice that the proposed CPG has a broad and important remit and that a large and varied selection of organisations, from Unison to Children in Scotland to the Scottish Association for Mental Health, will contribute. I hope that that bodes well.

Given that the remit is very broad, what are your personal success factors? In your mind, how will you know when you have a good CPG?

Fulton MacGregor: I think it is—

The Convener: That is a very open question for you, Fulton. What would success be for the CPG?

Fulton MacGregor: I apologise for jumping in there, convener.

That is a big question and a good one. In the previous session of Parliament, I had the privilege of starting a cross-party group from scratch and going through the process. I believe that that cross-party group has been successful. The organisations that are involved have attended regularly and we have done work that we hope helps other MSPs to see what is going on in the sector.

I hope that the CPG on social work will do the same. Since the hustings that I mentioned, the discussions that I have had with SASW have been really thorough. I have a lot of faith in that organisation, which is committed to the cross-party group. If the group goes ahead, I would be the convener, following on from the initial meeting. I have a background in social work and, as I said, I am very passionate about it and have, during my time as an MSP, maintained my registration as a

social worker. I want to hear what is going on. I have connections to the profession, outside of being an MSP.

I have a lot of faith that the cross-party group will be successful. For me, the group would be a big success if we were producing information and material that influenced policy and other MSPs in the Parliament.

Tess White: That is a good answer. Thank you.

09:30

The Convener: First, I want to note the thanks that you extended at the start of your comments to the others who have helped you. There are nameless people who work very hard behind the scenes in CPGs, and we might need to find some way of giving them recognition.

Secondly, I will highlight two points that you made in your remarks, which are mentioned in reference to the purpose of the group. The CPG will allow

“a space to collaboratively address issues”

across so many fields, and it will

“seek to raise awareness of the profession and to raise its profile in a positive way”,

which I think is much needed.

I thank Mr MacGregor for attending the meeting and for his application form and submission. We will take a decision on the proposal later in the meeting, and the clerks will notify the member in due course.

We now move to agenda item 3, which is approval of cross-party groups. As I have explained, Paul McLennan, who is a member of the committee, will step outside the room and not take part in the decision on the cross-party group on which he gave evidence this morning.

The committee is asked to consider whether to accord recognition to the proposed CPGs on the creative economy, India, the wellbeing economy and social work. Do members have any comments?

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): It would be difficult for the committee to look at each of the proposed groups individually and not think that there is huge merit in all of them and in everything that they are trying to achieve, but I want to place on record my concern about the number of cross-party groups in the Parliament and the amount of time that MSPs will have to commit in order to fulfil their duties on them. I know that Paul McLennan, who is a member of this committee, is on numerous groups. I applaud him for that, but there will have to come a stage at which the committee will need

to consider what is reasonable and right. Convener, I am delighted that it is not for me—*[Inaudible.]*—committees are not right, because it is an impossible task. I am just concerned about the amount of time that is being committed by MSPs.

The Convener: Thank you for those comments. We have previously discussed concerns not just about the quantity—if not the quality—of CPGs but, which is more important, about the time commitment that is required, which Edward Mountain has pointed out. For CPGs to work successfully—as, I think, Tess White managed to draw out in her questions on the proposed group that we considered previously—MSPs have to be able to put the time in, but the fact is that time can very quickly run away from us. The committee will return, sooner rather than later, to discuss—as Mr Mountain has rightly alluded—not individual CPGs but the landscape in which they sit.

If there are no other comments, do members agree to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party groups on the creative economy, India, the wellbeing economy and social work?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: With that, I invite Paul McLennan to return to the meeting.

Agenda item 4 is on cross-party groups that are seeking to re-register. I invite the committee to consider a change of purpose for the proposed CPGs on deafness, international development and Tibet, and a change of name and purpose for the proposed CPG on challenging racial and religious prejudice. As members will be aware, it is required that any change of name or purpose by a group be approved by the committee.

If there are no comments, do members agree that the proposed CPGs on deafness, international development, Tibet and challenging racial and religious prejudice can re-register in the new parliamentary session?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: That ends the public part of the meeting. We now move into private session.

09:34

Meeting continued in private until 09:43.

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