



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 13 January 2022

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
1st Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

George Adam (Minister for Parliamentary Business)

Lauchlan Hall (Scottish Government)

Iain Hockenhill (Scottish Government)

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con)

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab)

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 13 January 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Martin Whitfield): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the first meeting of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in 2022. I wish everyone a happy new year.

Our first agenda item is a decision on taking the final item in private. The committee needs to decide whether to take item 6, under which the committee will consider its approach to an inquiry on future parliamentary procedures and practices, in private. Do members agree to take item 6 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I am grateful to the committee for that.

Cross-Party Groups

09:31

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of applications for recognition from four proposed cross-party groups.

The first group that we will consider is a proposed CPG on beer and pubs. I welcome Craig Hoy MSP, who is the proposed convener of the proposed group. Good morning, Craig. I invite you to make a short statement in relation to the proposed CPG.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Good morning, Mr Whitfield, and a happy new year to you and committee members.

On 7 December 2021, the cross-party group on beer and pubs held its inaugural meeting, in order to prepare for this meeting. That was in recognition of the fact that there are now more than 4,600 pubs and 120 breweries in Scotland. The industry is an emerging sector, and there is presently no committee or cross-party group looking after its interests within the Parliament. We also know that, as well as being an emerging sector, it is a sector that is presently at risk as a result of the Covid pandemic and the restrictions that were imposed on the hospitality sector.

The purpose of the CPG is to celebrate, recognise and enhance the contribution of the brewing and pub-related hospitality industry in Scotland. We hope that the CPG will operate through semi-regular meetings, occasional visits and an annual event at which the best of Scotland's beer and pub sector can be showcased.

The CPG will aim to develop constituency-level awareness of the contribution of the beer and pub sector as well as an awards programme to encourage recognition of local pubs and breweries. I believe that the convener recognises that contribution due to the fact that, while serving as a member of Parliament, he nominated my local pub in East Lothian, the Tyneside Tavern—one of many excellent pubs in East Lothian and across the south of Scotland—for a local pub award.

The CPG will also provide a forum in which to discuss the policies that will impact on the beer and pub sector and affect beer drinkers and pub goers across Scotland. We will also look closely at the important issues of responsible drinking, the social impact of alcohol and the public health implications.

We understand that beer and pubs play a huge part in every region that we represent, socially and economically, and that they are job and wealth

creators. That will also be a core focus of the group.

With the committee's permission, I would be the convener of the group and Paul Sweeney would be the vice-convener. We also have a wide range of prospective members from across all parties. The secretariat would be provided and supported by the All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group, the Campaign for Real Ale—CAMRA—and the Society of Independent Brewers, which is known as SIBA. We would also be supported by the Scottish Beer and Pub Association. With that, I will hand back to the convener.

The Convener: Thank you very much for that presentation. Before we take the matter further, I note, in stark black and white, my name as a member of the proposed CPG, which is slightly unfortunate. As you may be aware, I have said that, in order to provide the distance for this committee to operate and because of my role as convener, I will not be joining or associating with any CPGs. I would be grateful if that could be rectified.

I am very supportive of the pub trade and recognise its importance across Scotland. My question relates to the secretariat and the relationship between the CPG, which sits here, in the Scottish Parliament, and the All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group, which sits in Westminster. Is it the case that the actual secretariat's support and work would be provided by CAMRA and SIBA rather than by the APPG in Westminster?

Craig Hoy: To put it simply, it would be CAMRA and SIBA. However, Paul Hegarty from the All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group attended as a guest and would be supportive in helping us establish some of the programmes that have been very successful at Westminster—such as the awards programme—as well as in relation to the possibility of getting a guest ale or beer into the parliamentary estate at Holyrood.

The Convener: Thank you very much for that clarification.

No other committee members have questions for you. The committee will consider whether to approve the application for recognition under agenda item 3 and the clerks will inform you of the committee's decision in due course. I thank you for coming along this morning.

Craig Hoy: Thank you very much for your time.

The Convener: The next group that we will consider is a proposed CPG on maritime and shipbuilding. I welcome Paul Sweeney MSP, who is the proposed convener of the proposed group. Good morning, Paul, and happy new year. I invite

you to give a short presentation to the committee about the intentions of the CPG.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning, convener, and thank you for the invitation to address the committee.

The proposed establishment of a cross-party group on maritime and shipbuilding is the first time that such a group has been proposed in the history of the Scottish Parliament. It is a vital exercise. At more than 6,000 miles, Scotland's coastline is longer than that of the People's Republic of China. For centuries, the maritime and shipbuilding sectors have been critical to the prosperity of the country.

As we look towards the future—particularly given the climate emergency—the economic and social opportunity that the sector presents to Scotland is very significant. I therefore think that it is timely to consider the setting up of this CPG.

I initially gauged opinion informally during the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow. I was able to secure the support of 15 colleagues for the creation of the cross-party group, which makes 16 members in total. We also secured the agreement of Maritime UK to provide the secretariat.

I am very pleased about the level of cross-party support for the objectives and intent of the CPG, which are to ensure that we have a focal point in our national Parliament to allow industry, trade unions and other stakeholders from across the country to come together and create a sounding board for the progress and development of the industry in Scotland. It will mean that we can be more responsive as a Parliament, hold the Government to account in relation to what it is doing to promote the sector, and give industry—and the workforce within it—a voice in the Parliament. On all those fronts, a cross-party group makes for a very good and worthwhile exercise.

There is a similar cross-party group on shipbuilding and ship repair in the House of Commons at Westminster, with which we hope to have a degree of collaboration in developing responses to things such as the United Kingdom Government's national shipbuilding strategy, a new version of which is due to be published in the coming weeks. That is another reason why the setting up of a CPG is a timely exercise.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I invite Edward Mountain to comment with regard to the proposed CPG. I will ask a couple of questions after that.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Thank you, convener. I will not be on any of the glamorous cross-party groups on topics

such as beer. However, I have agreed to be part of this group because I think that it is really important. Having agreed to be part of it, I do not think that it is appropriate that I ask questions in relation to it. I simply wanted that noted.

The Convener: Thank you for clarifying that. It is now on the record.

Paul, although the organisations that have expressed interest—in particular, Maritime UK, which will act as the secretariat—are relatively small in number compared with those on some CPGs, they cover a substantial part of the shipbuilding industry in Scotland. Will there be room for smaller players, if I can describe them as such? I see that you list the University of Strathclyde's department of naval architecture, and I am aware of other technical courses that relate to shipbuilding. I presume that the CPG is open to an approach from such groups.

Paul Sweeney: Absolutely. The list is just a starter for 10, and, as the CPG becomes better known, we will be more than happy to invite a broader cross-section of participation from across the industry.

Maritime UK has kindly and proactively agreed to steward the CPG by providing a secretariat. We have also had interest from BAE Systems, which is the biggest shipbuilding company in Scotland; the Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders in Scotland, which is a long-standing professional body for the industry; the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions; Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, which is the public sector procurement agent for CalMac Ferries; and academia. It is a good cross-section of interest. We have had interest, subsequently, from Malin Marine Services, which is an SME that is operating in the shipbuilding and engineering sector in Glasgow. Interest is growing at a fair pace, and we hope to continue to elicit support as we go forward.

The Convener: Excellent. I have a slightly cheeky question. Was it a slight surprise to find that there was no pre-existing cross-party group on shipbuilding in Scotland?

Paul Sweeney: I suppose that it is an issue of capacity. After taking out Government ministers and other members who cannot participate in CPGs, the number of members who are available to participate in any given CPG is quite restricted. I have a personal interest in the industry, having worked in the sector previously, so I felt that there was a gap in the market in which to set it up. I am grateful to colleagues for their support, and I hope that the CPG's first year will be a success.

The Convener: Excellent. Elena Whitham has a question.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Thank you, convener, and welcome, Paul. I have a quick question on the cross-CPG working that could perhaps happen. I am a member of the cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism, as is Stuart McMillan, who I note is on the membership list for your proposed CPG. Will there be plans to ensure that, where we can, we dovetail and work together? Do you anticipate that that will happen?

Paul Sweeney: Absolutely. Thank you very much for that comment, because that is exactly what we want to achieve. Even in conversations that we have had during initial informal meetings when considering setting up the CPG, a large amount of opportunity has presented itself, with companies saying that they want to bring everyone's attention to and increase the level of interest in building boats and ships in Scotland. There is so much work out there to be done. If we tie all the ideas together, we can seriously increase the number of jobs and amount of employment in the sector. There could be more manufacturing of recreational boats, and skills and apprenticeships—that is just one example. From fish farming to lifeboats and from offshore support vessels to bigger vessels such as ferries and cruise ships, there is a huge area of opportunity for us, so it is crucial that we tie together adjacent CPGs to ensure that we make the most of it.

Thank you very much. I am excited about the opportunity.

The Convener: Do any other committee members have a question that they would like to pose? I take the general silence as a no.

Thank you for attending, Paul. The committee will consider whether to approve the application for recognition under agenda item 3. The clerks will inform you of our decision thereafter.

Paul Sweeney: Thank you, convener.

The Convener: The next group that we will hear from is a proposed CPG on poverty. I welcome to the meeting Beatrice Wishart, who would be the deputy convener of the proposed group. I invite you to make an opening statement setting out the ideas behind the CPG.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Thank you, convener. Good morning to you and the committee members.

The cross-party group on poverty aims to act as a forum for exploring the drivers of and solutions to poverty in Scotland. It would act to connect MSPs with organisations that are working to tackle poverty, as well with people who are living on low incomes across Scotland, in order to better inform anti-poverty policy making and contribute to the

ending of poverty in Scotland, which I think everybody in the Parliament wants to see.

09:45

The group intends to explore the drivers of poverty and the different experiences of it across Scotland, covering issues such as stigma, rurality, race and disability as well as looking at the particular risk of poverty that is experienced by certain groups such as lone parents. We are keen to explore how we can gain greater consensus on the need to tackle poverty across political parties and Scottish society at large. Given that more than a million people in Scotland live in the grip of poverty, we believe that the group is hugely necessary and can make a real contribution towards on-going efforts to prevent and reduce poverty in Scotland's communities.

Already, we have been hugely encouraged by the enormous interest that we have seen in the group's work. Both the inaugural meeting and a subsequent informal meeting of the group attracted a large and diverse group of organisations and individuals. Many of those organisations are smaller, community-based organisations, which often struggle to have their voices heard in policy-making processes or in the Parliament, and we hope that the group will act as a forum for them to help to shape and influence discussions around poverty in Scotland.

Subject to the committee's decision, the group's convener will be Neil Gray and the deputy conveners will be Pam Duncan-Glancy, Jeremy Balfour and me. The secretariat for the group will be provided by the Poverty Alliance, Scotland's national anti-poverty network. We believe that it is the first-ever cross-party group on poverty, and we consider that it is in the public interest that MSPs of all parties, alongside expert stakeholders, work together to tackle poverty in Scotland.

The Convener: Thank you very much, Beatrice. Before we move on, Bob Doris would like to put something on the record.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Our papers note that, if the cross-party group was to get the approval of the committee, I would be a member. I attended the first meeting, which Beatrice Wishart spoke about. Clearly, therefore, I may be a bit prejudiced—in a positive sense—as to whether the group should go forward. Ms Wishart, I very much hope—I am sure—that it will draw on the lived experience of those who have had to endure poverty not just currently but over a number of years.

The Convener: Thank you, Bob. Your interest is noted on the record.

Beatrice, you have a substantial list of organisations, and you rightly pointed out that, often, those that are working in that field are small and are located in one geographical area but are doing extremely good work. If the proposed CPG goes ahead, will it be open to other third parties to join and to bring their lived experience—and, I hope, solutions—to the appalling problem of poverty across Scotland?

Beatrice Wishart: Absolutely. We are just getting going, and, if more people want to be involved, the door is open. Everybody's lived experience and, as you have said, smaller groups in communities all help, because the issue affects everybody across Scotland. That would be absolutely essential.

The Convener: Excellent. Thank you for that. Since no other committee member wishes to raise a question, I thank Beatrice Wishart for attending. At agenda item 3, the committee will consider whether to approve the application for recognition. The clerks will inform you, Beatrice, of the committee's decision thereafter.

Beatrice Wishart: Thank you, convener.

The Convener: The final group that we will consider today is the proposed CPG on sustainable transport. I welcome Graham Simpson MSP, who is its proposed convener. Good morning, Graham. Will you make an opening statement about the intentions of the CPG?

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Yes. Thank you, convener. It is a pleasure to join you this morning.

Before I get into my pitch for the CPG, I will just say how much I enjoyed the committee's recent debate in the chamber. I thought that it was excellent, and I appreciated your kind comments afterwards, convener. During that debate, I mentioned—I am being really cheeky here, but this is to inform the committee—that I have a proposed member's bill coming up. The consultation for that will go live next Thursday, and I will send it to the committee.

Having got that out of the way, I will talk about the CPG on sustainable transport. The background is that, in the previous session, there was a CPG on cycling, walking and buses and a separate CPG on rail. Those of us who were members of one or both of those groups got together and decided that it would make sense to merge them and call it the cross-party group on sustainable transport. Those who were involved in those—[*Interruption.*]

The Convener: It appears that Mr Simpson's video feed has frozen, and I do not know whether we will be able to return to it. I will give him a moment.

From looking at the BlueJeans attendance list, I think that we may well have lost Mr Simpson—unfortunately, he has dropped offline. Ah, the travails of information technology. I think that this has happened in order to give us more evidence for later discussion.

For the record, I thank Mr Simpson for his comments about our debate and the discussions that we had afterwards. In eager anticipation, I look forward to his bill winging its way to us.

I am not getting any indication that Mr Simpson is going to be able to rejoin us. I therefore move to agenda item 3, which is formal approval of the three cross-party groups that we have heard from this morning, on beer and pubs, maritime and shipbuilding, and poverty. Does any member have comments or views to express before I formally put the proposal to the committee? There is no indication that anyone has, so I formally propose that the three CPGs—on beer and pubs, maritime and shipbuilding, and poverty—be accorded recognition. Are we in agreement?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Excellent. I suspend the meeting to allow for a changeover of witnesses.

09:52

Meeting suspended.

09:58

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Scottish Local Government Elections Amendment Order 2022 [Draft]

The Convener: Item 4 is subordinate legislation. We will hear evidence on the draft Scottish Local Government Elections Amendment Order 2022 from the Minister for Parliamentary Business, George Adam, and Lauchlan Hall and Iain Hockenhull, who are his officials from the Scottish Government. I welcome all of you to the committee and invite the minister to make a short opening statement.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Good morning. As this is the first time I have seen the committee this year, I wish you all a happy new year, and I hope that you had a restful and enjoyable festive period.

I thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to discuss the proposed changes to the procedures for running local government elections in Scotland. During the productive session on 28 October last year, we had a discussion about a number of other Scottish statutory instruments, and committee members raised the matter of the monitoring of election expenses and the guidance that is available to candidates on that issue. Following that session, I reflected on those points with my officials and held follow-up discussions with the Electoral Commission. As a result, I am now proposing the provisions in the Scottish Local Government Elections Amendment Order 2022, which sets out a statutory role for the commission in producing and policing guidance in that area.

I want to make it clear that the Electoral Commission already produces guidance on candidates' expenditure, but that is carried out on a non-statutory and informal basis. The commission has welcomed the proposal to make its role statutory. That move will also bring arrangements in line with those for the Scottish Parliament elections. Overall, I consider that the changes will provide greater clarity on, and oversight of, electoral spending.

The order will bring forward the date when poll cards can be issued to electors. That change has been made specifically at the request of the convener of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland. I would not normally have made that change at this relatively late stage, but the convener of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland has requested it, and the change is to the benefit of the voter, so I decided to bring forward that amendment.

10:00

The changes are relatively minor, albeit important, and they will clearly not have a significant effect on candidates, electoral administrators or others in relation to preparing the elections in May. Therefore, I do not consider that the Gould principle is relevant in this case, and the Electoral Commission has indicated its agreement on that assessment.

I hope that the committee will agree that the provisions are positive changes that will benefit voters, candidates and administrators, and that it will therefore support the order.

Once again, I am happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.

The Convener: Thank you, minister. Before we come to questions, I invite Elena Whitham to put something on the record.

Elena Whitham: For the consideration of this agenda item, I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am still a sitting councillor in East Ayrshire Council.

The Convener: I am grateful for that. I apologise for not inviting you to put that on the record before I invited the minister to present his opening statement.

Minister, I will home in on a couple of points that it might be helpful to get some clarification on. What are the implications of the proposed changes for the transparency of election expenses in local government elections?

George Adam: I do not believe that there will be any impact. Candidates' expenses, returns and declarations are already available for public inspection for two years following their receipt by the returning officer, and copies can be requested on payment of a fee. The new requirement for returning officers to send copies of candidates' expenses, returns and declarations to the Electoral Commission, if requested, allows for the commission to request copies without payment of a fee.

The Convener: We should also formally put on the record that, if the order is agreed to, the intention is that it will affect any polling on or after 5 May, which includes the forthcoming local elections—hence the minister's evidence with regard to the Gould principle not being relevant.

I have a question about paragraph 10 of the policy note that you have delivered. I am fully aware that the answer to this question may not rest with you, minister, but I hope that it will rest with the others who are here today. It is about the commission's duties with respect to compliance. I understand that, when the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 came in, the

extensions that are being sought were specifically excluded from the commission's monitoring and compliance role. Are you or those around you aware of why they were specifically excluded at the time?

George Adam: I will ask Iain Hockenhull to give you a more detailed answer to that question. We can take it from there.

The Convener: That is very helpful.

Iain Hockenhull (Scottish Government): Good morning. Essentially, that act is UK legislation. At the time, the Scottish Parliament elections were within the control of the UK Government. The change in that provision was made in relation to UK elections and Scottish Parliament elections, but Scottish local government elections were devolved, so Scottish legislation would have been required to make the same change.

I am not sure why no one has made the change until now. It is probably a reflection of the point that the minister has made that, in practice, the commission is already fulfilling that role. The change formalises a role that the commission has been performing since that date. Therefore, there is probably not a great, pressing need for it, but the commission was keen for the role to be made formal in the instrument, and we have responded to that.

The Convener: That is very helpful.

George Adam: Ironically, I have had that conversation with officials as well. My question was why this has not been done before now. It simply appears to be yet another one of those quirks of local government elections, which we experienced in the previous session.

The Convener: That was sort of my understanding from reading through the legislative consent memorandum at the time. It is nice to be able to get this on a more formal statutory setting after some 22 years, if it is agreed to. That is very helpful.

My other question relates to the statement that there are no cost implications. Does that extend as far as the monitoring role that will become a statutory requirement for the Electoral Commission? Has that been considered?

George Adam: Yes. In discussions that we have had with the Electoral Commission, it has indicated that, as it has already carried out that role on an informal basis, it does not anticipate that any additional expenditure will be incurred. The hope is that, as it goes down the more formal route, it will be business as usual for it. The whole process is simply to enable the role to be part of the formal process, instead of the Electoral Commission almost being an afterthought. That is

not a place where we want to be. The aim is to formalise the whole process.

The Convener: Putting it on a statutory footing also helps in the movement away from the Government having to ask the Electoral Commission to do that.

George Adam: Indeed. It also gives us the opportunity for transparency. It looks and feels a lot better.

The Convener: I am grateful for that.

I am aware that a number of committee members have questions about the poll card situation. I will pass over to Edward Mountain.

Edward Mountain: I welcome the fact that you are bringing the issues back to the committee as a result of listening to a previous evidence session. I gently remind you that I raised the issue of the level of expenses. I hope that you will deal with that at a future committee meeting.

I turn to the issue of poll cards. Is this another quirk that has slipped past? It seems to make sense to bring the position into line with what happens in Scottish Parliament elections

George Adam: You are probably correct, Mr Mountain; it is probably another of those quirks. Local government elections are exactly what it says on the tin. They are run separately by local authorities in each of the 32 local authority areas. They are locally run. We have taken another look at many of the changes, and this is one of those. We have come to the conclusion that it is a better way of working.

I am always happy to listen to you, Mr Mountain, and to any ideas that you have. We may not always agree, but we have developed a reasonably good friendship over the years and are able to work with one another.

Edward Mountain: At the risk of damaging your political career, I say that I think that it is a good idea to bring the issuing of poll cards forward. There is a level of agreement—let us hope that we can also reach agreement on election expenses for councillors.

Elena Whitham: Minister, given the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, are there any plans to bring forward the deadline for postal votes at the local government elections, as was done for the Scottish Parliament election in 2021? Any change might affect voters' ability to register for an absentee vote, so the sooner that can be decided, the better.

George Adam: We live in exceptional circumstances. What happened in the 2021 election was driven by the need to ensure adequate time for administrators to process a possible surge in demand for postal votes due to

the pandemic. Given the increase in postal voters last May, we do not anticipate a similar increase this year, as many people who will want to vote by post will already have that facility in place. I have been voting by post since 2007. That was mainly a quirk of my being so busy in my working life, but I won an election that year and—although not being superstitious—just decided to remain a postal voter, and I have been winning elections ever since.

We do not anticipate encountering the same issue as last year. Postal voters will already be down to vote by post. Bringing forward the deadline would reduce the amount of time that people would have in which to apply for a postal vote. We do not anticipate there being any more postal voters than last year. We already have a solid group of individuals who have indicated that they wish to vote that way.

The Convener: There was a significant rise in postal votes for the Holyrood election, but there are a number of people who are unclear as to whether they registered for one election or for continuing postal votes. Indeed, I have spoken to members of the public who have been slightly caught out with that in a by-election. Has any analysis been done of the figures for people who signed up for the Holyrood election alone rather than for continuing postal votes up to the number of years that are permitted?

George Adam: As you are aware, convener, registration to vote is a rolling poll and we keep updating our information all the time. The communication will say that the individual is a postal voter and ask whether they wish to retain their postal vote. It is up to each individual to ensure that that happens.

I do not believe that any analysis has been done, but I am saying that from hearsay. I ask Iain Hockenhull to give you some solid facts on the matter.

Iain Hockenhull: We have asked electoral registration officers to provide us with some updated figures on the levels of postal voting. Last year's drive got postal voting registration up to around 23 per cent of the population. As you said, some people choose to register a postal vote only for a one-off occurrence, so we anticipate a bit of drop-off because of that. We hope that most people have gone for a continuing postal vote, but we do not know the exact split, so we have asked for the data to see what the current level is.

The concern about the substantial increase that was achieved last year was that electoral registration officers would not have enough time to process all the additional applications, which is why we modified the deadline. Having spoken to EROs, we do not anticipate as big a surge this

year, because of the work that was done last year, even though not all the requests were for a continuing postal vote. That is why we are not suggesting a change to the deadline.

The Convener: I am grateful for that.

Bob Doris: The minister said that election offices in each local authority area will remind individuals to ensure that their voter registration is still valid and at the address where they stay, remind them that they have a postal vote and ask whether they wish to retain it. Is there a uniform approach to that throughout Scotland? The Electoral Management Board for Scotland is involved with each local government election, but are there 32 ways that that happens in Scotland—one per local authority—or is there a more standardised approach?

I do not expect the minister to have the answer at his fingertips, but I ask in case the committee wants in future to examine the management of postal votes throughout Scotland. I am not saying that it will, but the convener's question was interesting.

George Adam: Actually, it is a good question, Mr Doris, and I would be interested in the answer myself. I assume that it is a standardised approach across all 32 local authorities, but I ask Iain Hockenhull whether he can give us further information.

Iain Hockenhull: Several EROs cover more than one local authority. I am desperately trying to remember how many electoral registration officers there are. I think that it is around 12 or 16—colleagues might be about to tell me—but I cannot remember the exact number. In effect, electoral registration officers follow similar approaches. They have a variety of systems—there are at least two and probably three systems in use—but, in essence, they follow the same processes, guided by the Electoral Management Board.

10:15

The Convener: I will ask a final question to ensure that it is on the record. The period for scrutiny was shortened because of the urgency of the legislation, and a relatively small number of groups were consulted on it. The policy document says that there was support for the change. From the consultation, was there any disagreement about the early issuing of poll cards?

George Adam: I will also say something so that I can get it on the record. Information on the proposed changes was shared with the Electoral Commission, the Electoral Management Board for Scotland, the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Scottish Assessors Association's electoral registration committee, the Society of Local Authority Lawyers and

Administrators in Scotland, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, political parties that are represented in the Scottish Parliament and community groups that represent people with protected characteristics.

It is worth stressing that the change was requested by the convener of the Electoral Management Board. The board approached us and asked us to make the change. When we looked at the matter, as we are doing in our discussion at the moment, we thought that it made sense to make the change, so, on the Electoral Management Board's say-so, we decided to progress with it.

Is that the normal way that I like to go about business? Probably not, but I do not believe that the change will make any difference to elections, candidates or administrators. The change also makes sense.

I will bring in Iain Hockenhull to say whether anyone said anything during the consultation that could be construed as negative.

Iain Hockenhull: I do not think that anyone did. We think that the changes affect only the Electoral Commission and the Electoral Management Board, both of which actively requested the changes. We do not think that the impact on anyone else will be notable.

By the way, a colleague has highlighted to me that there are 15 electoral registration officers. I am sorry for inflating their numbers.

The Convener: Thank you for putting that on the record.

As members have no more questions, I thank the minister and his officials, as ever, for their evidence.

The minister will remain present for item 5. I invite him to move motion S6M-02576.

Motion moved,

That the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee recommends that the Scottish Local Government Elections Amendment Order 2022 be approved.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: Are members content for me to sign off the committee's report to the Parliament on the instrument?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I thank the minister and his officials for attending this morning's meeting, and I close the public part of the meeting.

10:19

Meeting continued in private until 10:56.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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