



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

**Thursday 3 February 2022**

**Session 6**



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**STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE**  
**4<sup>th</sup> 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)

\*Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP)

\*Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con)

Foysof Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab)

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab)

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab)

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Katy Orr

**LOCATION**

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)



# Scottish Parliament

## Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 3 February 2022

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]*

### Cross-Party Groups

**The Convener (Martin Whitfield):** Good morning, and welcome to the fourth meeting in 2022 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

Agenda item 1 is consideration of applications for recognition from four cross-party groups, the first of which is a proposed CPG on changing places toilets. I welcome to the meeting Paul O’Kane, the convener of the proposed group, and invite him to make an opening statement about the intentions behind the group.

**Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** Good morning, committee. I propose the formation of a cross-party group on changing places toilets, the purpose of which is to raise awareness of the essential need for accessible toilets for all of Scotland’s citizens and to investigate the feasibility of a changing places toilets fund that can be accessed by local authorities and small community groups. The group would continue the work of former MSP Mary Fee and the currently serving MSP Jeremy Balfour.

Scottish disability charities and changing places toilets campaigners have called on the Scottish Government to recognise that not all of Scotland’s citizens are being treated equally, with a section of society not being able to access basic human rights and have their needs met. Because of a lack of facilities, adults and children who have a disability often have their toileting needs met by having to lie on toilet floors, with no privacy or dignity. That can lead to a host of problems such as infections, mental health issues as a result of their not being able to leave their homes and the possibility of hospitalisation, which in the long run affects the public purse.

The group would like to explore with retail and business how they could change their outlook on disability and how changing their business model could be beneficial to all, and we would invite parents, carers and additional support needs teachers to join the group, give their testimony of lived experience and say what they would like the group and the Scottish Government to take on board and consider.

We would like to investigate issues such as tourism and Scotland as a holiday destination of choice for families with a disability. We would also like to focus on building design and the use of our public buildings and spaces in Scotland, and we would propose to discuss with the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland the feasibility of designs for changing places toilets and how such toilets could be placed in public buildings. Based on research, we would propose a changing places toilets standard for buildings across Scotland, and we would work collaboratively on that with Government departments and ministers.

I appreciate the committee’s consideration of our application.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. Do members have any questions?

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** At the moment, local authorities are having to close many of their public toilets as a result of cost challenges. Indeed, that is a significant issue in the city of Edinburgh. Would that also be covered under the group’s remit?

**Paul O’Kane:** Thank you for that question. It is a vital issue, and the CPG will want to look at the availability of facilities, because we know that families, particularly those with children who have a disability, often struggle to access toilets in city centres or on days out. Indeed, spontaneity is not possible for many families, because they cannot access those facilities. We would certainly want to look, with local authorities and others, at current provision and where there are any gaps that can be filled.

**Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** After reading the papers, I did a bit of homework on the changing places facilities in my East Kilbride constituency, and I was quite alarmed to find that there was only one. I see that there is a changing places website, and I was wondering whether the cross-party group will promote the use of that.

I have to say that I was alarmed by what I found for numerous reasons; indeed, someone close to me had colitis and needed to ensure that they had proper changing facilities. I also thought about people who are breastfeeding. Years ago, things were quite undignified in that respect. Will the group look at those kinds of areas, too?

Finally, notwithstanding the budget challenges that local authorities face, which Sue Webber referred to, can consideration be given to how we can better promote the changing places toilets app at local authority level?

**Paul O’Kane:** Thank you for the question and for raising that vital issue. We had previously

engaged with Euan's Guide, which provides a lot of information on accessible facilities, including changing places toilets, and we would be keen to engage further in that respect. We have made some progress—facilities are available, and the Government has agreed to put more investment into our public buildings—but, often, the issue for families is knowing what is available and where they can access the facilities. The point about town centres is well made, and I go back to the comment that I made to Ms Webber about families not being able to plan a day out, even to, say, the shopping centre in East Kilbride, without the security of knowing that facilities will be available for them.

We are also hoping to map facilities in service stations, for example, to ensure that people who want to go on holiday here and drive along the north coast 500 or to some of the other places on our doorstep can do so. Holidays are crucial, particularly for families with young children who have life-limiting conditions and disabilities. Investing in a current map of facilities in Scotland, getting that information out to people and being able to add to it will be crucial, and all the partners involved in the CPG will want to take that forward.

**Collette Stevenson:** Are the criteria for changing places toilets quite robust? How difficult or easy is it to get a changing places toilet recognised?

**Paul O'Kane:** For many years, the problem has been that people have had disabled facilities or a certain level of facility that they would view as a changing places toilet. However, such facilities have to conform to a very clear set of standards, which include space requirements, showering facilities and ensuring that people have enough room to move around in. That information has all been laid out, and I can provide members with it, if that would be helpful.

Essentially, it is quite a robust set of standards, and part of the challenge is that the costs can often be prohibitive, particularly for a community organisation that runs a community facility through, say, asset transfer. Because putting in such facilities can be quite expensive, we are proposing to work collaboratively with Government on a fund that would allow community organisations in particular to do that.

**The Convener:** I call Bob Doris, who joins us remotely today. Over to you, Bob.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I thank Paul O'Kane for bringing this cross-party group application to this morning's meeting. I have been following the conversation and have read the paperwork really closely, and I think that it is right that we highlight the strain on the public purse and think about how

we most effectively direct cash towards enhancing a network of essential provision. You made that point very well, and I also note your comments about tourism.

I was wondering about corporate Scotland and putting duties and obligations on our private companies, some of which are still doing okay in the current climate, to work in partnership with you and to commit to putting in changing places toilets, with child facilities and the like, and making them publicly available on the national network. Will there be a relationship with the private sector and corporate Scotland in that respect?

**Paul O'Kane:** I thank Mr Doris for that very important question. I certainly think that the CPG would be keen to engage in that sort of thing. I believe that Sainsbury's is doing work on a network of in-store changing places toilets, and that would certainly be of interest to us. Our other larger supermarkets are often well located with regard to where people might go and use facilities, and we also have to work with in-town and out-of-town shopping centres and other commercial organisations to ensure that they, too, are playing their part. As we know, they have the resources to put in such facilities and ensure that they are serving their customers better. We would want to explore with them and, indeed, with Government whether anything further can be done to persuade, cajole and perhaps compel the corporate world to do that.

**The Convener:** I notice that Angela Dulley, who is a well-known campaigner on the matter, has offered to provide the secretarial support for the group.

Thank you for coming along, Paul. We will make a decision on the proposed group under the next agenda item and the clerks will let you know in due course.

**Paul O'Kane:** I thank you and your colleagues on the committee.

**The Convener:** The next application that we will consider is for a proposed CPG on Bangladesh. I welcome Foyso Choudhury, who is the convener of the proposed group. He joins us online. I invite him to make an opening statement about the proposed CPG.

**Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank committee members for their time. I am sorry that I did not realise that I could have attended in person—I thought that everything was being done through BlueJeans.

The purpose of the cross-party group on Bangladesh is to promote and enhance understanding between Scotland and Bangladesh at a cultural, social, political and economic level. Our intention is to develop contact with the

Bangladesh Parliament and other institutions, including the Bangladesh consulate in Edinburgh and the embassy in London, to progress such dialogue.

The group will also advance the mutual interests of Scotland and Bangladesh by representing the interests of citizen organisations with a Bangladeshi background in Scotland and acting as a forum for the Bangladeshi community. In the Bangladeshi community, there is a keen interest to know about the Scottish Parliament's procedures, be part of Scottish democracy and learn what could be used for future elections in Bangladesh. We will do that along with our friends in Westminster. With the all-party parliamentary group on Bangladesh, we will work on research and develop a work plan for the growing Bangladeshi community in Scotland.

The CPG would be a new group focused on Bangladesh and would not overlap with any current CPGs. The topics that were discussed at our initial meeting and that will form our work plan include investment, trade, tourism, travel, the environment and education.

We want to build on the momentum that we have from the 26th UN climate change conference of the parties—COP26—when we made history by having the Bangladeshi Prime Minister in Parliament. We heard about the challenges that the country faces with the threat of climate change. COP26 has shown that we can deliver genuine changes only if we are united. I know that the United Kingdom, Scotland and Bangladesh will work shoulder to shoulder to tackle climate change.

Thank you for listening to me.

**The Convener:** Thank you, Foysol. It was a great pleasure to welcome the Bangladeshi Prime Minister to the Parliament during COP26.

You mentioned connections with the APPG at Westminster. However, the CPG will be distinct and separate from that and will concentrate on the Bangladeshi community in Scotland. Rather than being a subset of the APPG, it will be a self-standing CPG that will operate on its own. Is that correct?

**Foysol Choudhury:** Yes, of course. We just want to share the APPG's ideas, find out how it does things and gain information. Our CPG is mainly based on the community in Scotland.

**The Convener:** The list of organisations to which the proposed CPG has reached out and that want to be involved is testament to the importance of the Bangladeshi community in Scotland and the widespread understanding of that in civic Scotland.

As there are no further questions, I thank you for attending. The decision on the application will be made under the next agenda item and the clerks will be in touch after the meeting.

**Foysol Choudhury:** Thank you very much, convener and committee members. I hope to see you soon.

**The Convener:** The next proposed CPG is on migration. I welcome to the meeting Paul Sweeney MSP, who is the proposed convener of the new group. Would you like to make an opening statement on the intentions of the CPG, Paul?

09:45

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** Thank you very much for inviting me to address the committee, convener.

The proposed cross-party group on migration would be quite a wide-ranging forum in which stakeholders, policy makers and those with lived experience would discuss any matters arising in relation to migrants, refugees or people seeking asylum in Scotland. Although immigration policy is a reserved matter for the House of Commons, the cross-party group would engage on, consider and raise awareness of ways in which we can make an impact on issues to do with immigration and migration, asylum and refugees in Scotland, because there are a number of important interfaces with the Scottish Parliament's competencies as well as with local government colleagues. Having an integrated approach is vital to improving the quality of life for people who are affected by current policy.

The area is definitely well established as a public interest area. Currently, there is no CPG that focuses on it at Holyrood, despite thousands of people in Scotland being impacted by the issues.

The creation of the cross-party group would be particularly beneficial given recent significant and relevant events such as the passage of the Nationality and Borders Bill in the UK Parliament and the on-going humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. Do committee members have any questions about the proposed CPG?

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** What are your key measures of success, Mr Sweeney?

**Paul Sweeney:** The key measure of success is effectively expediting policy ideas that key stakeholder groups, particularly in Glasgow, have been advocating. Almost all asylum seekers in Scotland are resident in the Glasgow City Council

area, because it is the only council area in Scotland that participates in the dispersal programme. However, there are refugee communities around Scotland and resettlement programmes in the refugee programme that disperse people around Scotland. A number of concerns have been raised by key stakeholder groups, particularly Maryhill Integration Network, which has been especially instrumental in helping to establish the cross-party group. There are issues to do with exclusion from housing, transport and social exclusion. Obviously, there was the tragedy with the Park Inn disaster in Glasgow in the summer of 2020.

Bearing in mind all those issues, it is important to bring together the forum to allow us to channel frustrations and issues so that the Scottish Government can potentially ameliorate some of the concerns that people are experiencing. That would be largely in a humanitarian sense; it would not necessarily interfere with immigration policy or even with the no recourse to public funds condition, which is a potential condition on social security support.

One suggestion has been the extension of concessionary travel to asylum seekers. That would be within the gift of the Scottish Government. The cross-party group could promote such ideas.

**Tess White:** I want to ask about any overlaps with the work of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee. Is it the intention that the CPG would identify issues and then move towards petitions?

**Paul Sweeney:** That has not been explicitly discussed thus far, but that is a helpful suggestion. I can envisage that potentially being a measure. There would be efforts to engage with stakeholders and perhaps directly with ministers, non-governmental organisations and various other organisations, to pool understanding and share common practice.

Quite a wide range of organisations, which I have listed, support the CPG. They are the Maryhill Integration Network, the voices network, Safe in Scotland, the British Red Cross, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Scottish Detainee Visitors—particularly in relation to Dungavel—JustRight Scotland, Positive Action in Housing, Migration Policy Scotland, Refugees for Justice and the Govan Community Project. There is quite a rich ecosystem out there, but people often operate in silos and are disjointed. Part of the function of the CPG will be to act as a sounding board so that people can share experiences, rally round common themes such as housing, transport, income, deprivation and poverty, and, I hope, pull together actions that they can share objectives on,

pushing them to the Government and asking whether they can get improvements or measures to address them.

**Bob Doris:** I thank Paul Sweeney for bringing his proposals for a cross-party group to the committee. I should declare an interest: it was a pleasure to go to the first meeting of the proposed cross-party group with him and others, and, should the group be successfully established, I will be its deputy convener. You might be able to take from that that I have good will towards the committee agreeing to recognise the group.

I will make one observation. Immigration is a reserved matter, but caring for people who have chosen to make their lives in Scotland—those who have come to our shores to flee violence or persecution, or for whatever other reason—is, of course, not a reserved matter. It is the core business of representing our constituents, irrespective of where they came from or how long they have been in Scotland. The group will go some way towards ensuring that the Parliament fulfils that important role.

**The Convener:** Thank you for indicating your interest in the matter. Although it is not a formal requirement under the rules, I am sure that you will take part in the usual practice of stepping out while the decision on the CPG is made. We note your interest. I saw your eyes and Paul Sweeney's whirring at the idea of a petition.

**Collette Stevenson:** I very much welcome the proposed CPG. Recently, several issues have arisen in East Kilbride relating to accommodation and whether people have the status of asylum seeker or refugee. It was interesting to find that out. I found it quite alarming that, despite the fact that those people have very basic hotel accommodation, they get only £8 per week. I wonder whether that issue will come up in the CPG.

**Paul Sweeney:** The income allowances that are provided to people in the asylum process are very meagre. People who are in bed and breakfast accommodation basically get only £1 a day, and people who are in flats get slightly more than that—about £7 a day. That is well below the baseline social security to which a citizen would be entitled, so there are acute poverty and deprivation issues.

In relation to B and B accommodation, there is a housing contract between the Home Office and a private sector operator—Mears Group—which is obliged to provide accommodation for those in the asylum system. However, given the pressures on the system, it is not able to acquire enough housing units from registered social landlords and private providers to put everyone in flats, so

people are being put in hotels to backfill the demand.

The problem is that that leads to significant welfare problems. I mentioned the Park Inn disaster, which emanated from people who were suffering from acute mental health problems and trauma being corralled into a hotel. The catering, for example, was not culturally appropriate, so food was being served that people could not digest. People from sub-Saharan Africa cannot really eat a cooked breakfast.

There will be an opportunity to provide the housing provider with feedback from stakeholders on the ground, who could say, "This is a really big problem. We need to get a grip on this." That could improve the situation at the margins. It is those little things that could solve a lot of the bigger problems that could cause a risk to life, given the high pressure that people who have fled from severe, disastrous situations can often experience.

For all those reasons, it is important that the CPG would offer a sounding board in the Parliament. The group would have more rapid access to ministers, as well as members being able to raise issues in the chamber. The group would be worth while in that sense.

**Collette Stevenson:** That is very welcome.

**The Convener:** I will ask a question for the purpose of clarification. The group will be called the migration CPG, but we have talked a lot about asylum and refugee status. Is it the intention that, in due course, the group will look at broader migratory pressures and challenges that people might face in coming to Scotland?

**Paul Sweeney:** That is an important point. We deliberately used a broad definition because a lot of the issues have important interfaces. For example, there is the matter of access to student opportunities, and there is a wider issue about European Union migration and the future status of EU citizens in Scotland and the UK. Scotland faces broader demographic challenges, caused by an ageing population and a narrowing tax base. It is important for a sustainable economy to have a larger working-age population; therefore, we need a greater influx of working-age people. That will all be part of the discussion.

We are trying to frame the issue of migration in a less confrontational, more sensible and rational way. That is the broader idea. Having Maryhill Integration Network, which is highly engaged with asylum seekers, as the secretariat colours the initial objectives of the CPG, but it can evolve. That is why we have left the definition loose.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that clarification and for putting on record that Maryhill Integration Network has offered to be the secretariat.

Paul Sweeney, thank you for attending today. The committee will consider whether to approve the application for recognition as part of its next agenda item, and the clerks will inform you of the outcome in due course.

**Paul Sweeney:** I thank everyone for their consideration.

**The Convener:** There will be a short suspension while we change witnesses.

09:55

*Meeting suspended.*

09:56

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** Welcome back. I welcome Jeremy Balfour MSP, who joins us to talk about the proposed CPG on older people, age and ageing, which I will quote very carefully. I invite Jeremy, who is the proposed convener, to make a statement about the intentions of the group.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** This group is slightly different from the two that were previously discussed, because it was the very first cross-party group to be established in the Scottish Parliament, back in 2000. Unfortunately, due to administrative issues and because Sandra White chose not to stand for re-election, we were a little slow in getting our ducks lined up. We have them lined up now and are keen and ready to go.

Without being too rude, I note that the group applies to most of us, because Age Scotland now defines being old as being over 50.

**Sue Webber:** Not me then.

**Jeremy Balfour:** I am not asking anyone to declare an interest in the matter.

This is a big issue. We have an ageing population, and older people face many challenges. Particularly in the past two years, we have seen the challenges of isolation and of getting back into employment, and we have seen issues with care at home. Without wishing to prejudge, those will be some of the issues on our agenda in the coming months.

If the committee decides this morning to allow the group to go ahead, we will begin by trying to get as much information as possible about the experience of the past two years, so that the cross-party group can feed that into the public inquiry into Covid-19 that will take place. That will give an insight into the experiences of

organisations and individuals across Scotland. We will look at other issues after that.

I hope that the group will be able to continue, and I am happy to answer any questions.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that and for pointing out the pre-existence of the CPG. We note what you have said about administrative errors and thank you for the step that you have taken today in re-applying for recognition.

Do members have any questions?

**Sue Webber:** There are many stakeholders on your list. How do you foresee managing that? The group crosses all of society.

**Jeremy Balfour:** Believe it or not, that list has been culled. The list was twice that size. Before proceeding, we emailed everyone who had been part of the group in the previous Parliament, but about half of them had moved on or were no longer involved. It is a large group.

On Tuesday, we had a meeting of the cross-party group on disability, and it was interesting that almost everybody wanted to do it by Zoom. That makes a massive difference. Instead of having to come here, as used to be the case, people can log in whether they are in Inverness, Aberdeen or elsewhere. That will probably be the model that we look at in the future, at least for the majority of our meetings, because it means that people can take part.

10:00

It is a large group, so we have an official smaller working group that meets to set the agenda, which is then fed into the wider group for approval. For me, having a larger group is a positive, because there is such diversity. If you have 50 to 100-plus people, that is a lot of different interests, and some people are working, some are retired and so on.

In the previous parliamentary session, when we used to meet here, we had to take the largest meeting room, because it was jam-packed. We hope to have some face-to-face meetings as well.

**The Convener:** I note that Christine Ryder from Outside the Box, which I understand is a facilitating charity, has offered secretariat support but is not listed as one of the non-MSP members of the group. Is that because it is just offering secretariat support and facilitation, rather than contributing to the content of the CPG?

**Jeremy Balfour:** That is right. Outside the Box will offer secretariat work. Obviously, it will be there, but the relationship is slightly different. The organisation is also quite new to the work, so it is just putting its foot into the water. That is the relationship at the moment, but it might well become a member quite quickly.

**The Convener:** Excellent. Thank you for clarifying that.

Thank you for coming along this morning. We will take the decision under the next agenda item, and the clerks will be in touch in due course with the decision.

**Jeremy Balfour:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** We move to the next item. The committee is to consider whether to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party groups on Bangladesh; changing places toilets; migration; and older people, age and ageing. I can see that no members wish to ask questions or make a comment, so I will put the question. Are members agreed to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party groups on Bangladesh; changing places toilets; migration; and older people, age and ageing?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** I thank everyone for their attendance today.

*Meeting closed at 10:02.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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