



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 19 January 2023

Session 6



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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
1st Meeting 2023, 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)

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

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 19 January 2023

[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 in 2023 of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take business in private. Do members agree to take in private agenda item 6, under which the committee will discuss the cross-party group system, and agenda item 7, under which the committee will consider correspondence that we have received from the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Cross-Party Group

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is the proposed cross-party group on space. I welcome to the meeting Colin Beattie MSP, who is the proposed convener of the proposed cross-party group. I invite Colin to make an opening statement on the group's intentions and the interest that there has been in it.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I thank the committee for the opportunity to say a few words in support of the proposed cross-party group on space.

It is really all rather exciting. I know that members will have read the purpose of the group. They will have noticed in that document that we talked about the importance of the space sector to the economy of Scotland and to the wider United Kingdom. In that regard, I have been in touch with the chair of the Westminster all-party parliamentary group on space, and we have agreed that we will liaise and do the best that we can to have a joined-up approach.

There is very little awareness of how much the space industry contributes to the Scottish economy and of how we can help to develop it. According to the industry, there are currently 97 companies—Scottish small and medium-sized enterprises and rather larger companies—involved in Scotland. If members look at the list of non-MSP members of the proposed group, they will see Airbus, Lockheed Martin, the UK Government's Department for International Trade and a number of others, including universities. A number of others are in the process of moving down the road of signing up.

Scotland is home to a fifth of the space jobs in the UK. Fifty-two per cent of nanosatellites in the world are produced in Glasgow. Therefore, we have a huge commitment to the space industry.

Alongside that, the number of space businesses has increased by 65 per cent since 2016. That is evident in the numbers that are we are seeing—and the number of space businesses is still expanding. We are leading the way on the space industry. For example, the UK Astronomy Technology Centre, which is based at the Royal Observatory in Edinburgh, is the national centre of excellence for the development of scientific instrumentation and facilities for ground and space-based astronomy. The Phoenix-based Mangata Networks, which is described as

"an innovative satellite-enabled cloud services company",

has said that Ayrshire will be the centre for its research and development activities as well as satellite manufacturing, which will, of course, increase the proportion of satellites produced in

Scotland. It will create 575 jobs at the new space research and development facility.

From astronomy to pure science, manufacturing, launch, and data use and application, the sector is a complex one with a wide-ranging and transformational impact. The exciting work that is taking place in Scotland needs a platform for discussion and to highlight to parliamentarians the world-leading changing innovations that are happening on our doorstep in Scotland.

Since the application form was submitted, two other organisations—Skyrora and Global Trek Aviation—have signed up. I have a particular feeling for Skyrora because it is in my constituency, I have stood beside its rockets and it really is impressive. That really is exciting.

We have 23 of the 97 organisations signed up and we are in discussion with many more. I am also pleased that the establishment of the CPG has attracted attention from the various political parties. It is rare to have representatives of four different political parties signed up to a cross-party group. These days, we struggle to get two or three to do that. That demonstrates the interest and the need for the cross-party group, and I think it will strengthen and increase in size.

On possible duplications or overlaps, the CPG on aviation used to touch on space, but, from the minutes, that appeared to be rare and it did not touch on the breadth and depth of the space industry, which is on a huge scale. The group seemed to focus more on the large commercial airlines, airports and travel agent groups. Bringing focus to the huge and growing space industry in Scotland is tremendously important. The sector simply warrants a dedicated CPG, as no other CPG fully captures it.

I am aware that there is a large number of CPGs, which is why I am here. I have been careful not to commit myself to a large number of CPGs this session, so that I can keep my focus on the CPGs of which I am convener and member. I believe that the members who have signed up to this CPG will have had the same considerations.

The CPG has three deputy conveners and me as convener, which will ensure that proper support can be given to the CPG and will give other MSPs the capacity to step in should someone not be available.

The group plans to meet about four times a year, more or less in the same way as other CPGs, but we will be a bit flexible on that. We are dealing with a lot of people and a complex and wide industry, so we will be a wee bit flexible about when we meet.

Given the support within the Parliament and from the industry groups, our link with the Westminster APPG, and the fact that we even have UK Government departments as members, which is probably a first, there is a strong case for this CPG, and I hope that the committee will give it due consideration.

The Convener: Thank you, Colin. It is nice to see—and I mean this in the most polite of ways—the almost juvenile excitement about Skyrora signing up to the group. It speaks to an interesting time with regard to space here, in Scotland, where there is almost that childhood excitement about rockets and satellites. The reality is that a significant number of jobs already exist in the industry, as you have indicated.

Before I invite other members of the committee to contribute, can you confirm the extent of what you are covering with regard to space? I could read the quote about the final frontier if it covers everything. Your interest is in the launch site facilities and the engineering behind the production of satellites and all the supply chains into that in Scotland—is that right?

Colin Beattie: That is correct. We are taking a wide focus at this point. In our early meetings, I expect that the members will indicate where they need to focus attention through the CPG in order to gain awareness of the issues that the industry faces. I know that there will be regulatory issues and so on, some of which lie with the Scottish Government and some of which lie with the UK Government. The link between the two cross-party groups at the opposite ends of the country will be really useful for lobbying for what is needed to make sure that the industry is successful.

The Convener: Thank you. That is helpful. Do any other committee members have any questions? I will start at the far end, with Alexander Stewart.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, convener, and thank you, Mr Beattie, for a good synopsis and an introduction to where you are in the process. You have identified the gap in the market where the Parliament can be actively involved.

What are your initial plans? You have a huge amount of information and many organisations involved, so how do you plan to streamline that to capture what is required of such a progressive industry? You have already identified a massive market and opportunity, but you need to streamline that so that the CPG benefits from that early in its existence.

Colin Beattie: Clearly, it is a huge industry and there is a limit to what a CPG can do in meeting perhaps four times a year. As I see it, we would focus on two areas. One is the information side,

which is about ensuring that MSPs are informed and understand the developments and what is happening. The other area, which is something that we will have to talk to the industry members about, is about where there are weaknesses or things that we can do to lobby or persuade. You will understand the limitations of a CPG, but, where there are problems and glitches, we can raise them to the surface and maybe collectively help with them.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I am interested in the cross-party group, although I have not explored it in any great detail. I should declare an interest in that the West of Scotland Science Park is in my constituency of Maryhill and Springburn, where we have a number of very successful technology companies that are actively involved in the space sector. Therefore, Maryhill has a footprint in space.

I may join this cross-party group if it is afforded recognition, but the time constraints that I am under are such that I would not take on an office-bearer position and I might only come to an occasional meeting that had a particular constituency interest. I understand the time constraints that MSPs are under. You are the convener of three cross-party groups already, and you want to become the convener of a fourth. That is a significant time commitment. Do you feel that you have sufficient time to commit to being convener of four cross-party groups?

Colin Beattie: This cross-party group has already attracted a huge amount of attention and interest. MSPs become engaged in things for different reasons. It is partly about their own interests and partly about the interests of their constituents and so on. As far as the space CPG is concerned, the level of interest is probably the highest that I have seen in a long time. You talk about perhaps having time only to drop in on discussions that relate to your constituency. That is absolutely fine; indeed, it would be encouraged.

Bob Doris: I was talking about your time constraints rather than mine. You are convener of three cross-party groups, and you would become the convener of a fourth. Every potential cross-party group in the future will be asked similar questions—there is nothing specific to you or this cross-party group. It is a significant commitment to be convener of four cross-party groups. Do you feel that you can give it the time that it deserves?

Colin Beattie: Yes, I do. The industry members are taking on the secretarial and administration work. They are providing all the support, so the impact on my office will be relatively low. There will have to be input from the convener and, I hope, the active MSPs, but I am absolutely certain that I have the time. I would not have gone into

this if I did not believe that I had the time to commit to the group. Frankly, given the nature of what we are looking at, it is a priority for Scotland and for the rest of the UK. It would be a serious deficiency—I almost said “space”—in the range of CPGs that we provide if this vital area was not covered.

Bob Doris: I will follow that up a little. If this group is accepted, it will be the eighth cross-party group of which you are a member. I convene two cross-party groups that have lots of really good purposes. One is that they can connect a sector in a way in which it would not otherwise be connected. Do you feel that the space industry is already well connected as a sector and that it already has good links with government at all levels, whether that is local authorities, the Scottish Government or the UK Government? I ask that question because you mentioned that it would be a “serious deficiency” if we did not have this cross-party group and that, where problems emerge, the group could be a vehicle for tackling some of them. Can you give an example of what those problems are, or is everything tickety-boo at the moment? What are the issues?

Colin Beattie: In the early stages of discussions, when we were putting the group together, a couple of areas were highlighted that were causing some issues. One was about Government policy, both north and south of the border, and the lack of clarification that would allow the industry to develop. There were also concerns about regulatory constraints, because the regulations are not moving as fast as the space industry is. That is a UK issue that we would hope to highlight and explore with the APPG in Westminster.

09:45

We need a joined-up approach on this, because a lot of the companies that are signing up are operating north and south of the border. Things will be a little bit complicated until we get them bedded in, but, if we can make it work, the benefits to Scotland will be significant.

As you know, cross-party groups have no actual power, but they have the power of ensuring that views are heard and publicised and that people understand what the issues are. Government ministers are generous with their time when it comes to attending CPGs, which can help them to understand the issues.

There are a lot of issues around CPGs that deal with various competing bodies—some of the bodies that we are talking about are competitors, and I suspect that Airbus and Lockheed Martin are not commercially joined at the hip. However, if those issues are, indeed, important, they can be

worked out by the participants who are pushing for the CPG—and they are pushing for it, because they see a value in it. There are many common issues—around planning, regulation and policy—and we can help to focus minds and bring those issues together. The work that is done will be much more powerful if it can be done in tandem in Scotland and at Westminster.

Bob Doris: I apologise that I used the expression “tickety-boo” in a committee meeting—can we strike that from the record forthwith?

I am glad that I pushed you on the issue, Mr Beattie, because that was the first time that I have heard you describe what emerging issues there could be in the sector that MSPs would want to be sighted on and take forward on a cross-party basis, which are those that relate to clarity of Government policy in Scotland and the UK and the regulatory regime. We are starting to hit on things where there could be a public interest in MSPs pushing matters forward within the Parliament’s cross-party group system. What you have said gives me a lot more certainty about the benefit of this cross-party group, and I thank you for that.

The Convener: Thank you for attending, Mr Beattie. The committee will now consider whether to approve the application, and the clerks will inform you of our decision in due course.

Under agenda item 3, the committee will consider whether to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group on space. Are there any comments?

Bob Doris: I have a general comment, although it might be unfair to Mr Beattie. My last line of questioning was quite important because, before that, although I was getting a picture of a powerful, dynamic and growing industry in Scotland and the UK, which is good news, I was a little unclear about the benefit to Parliament of having the CPG—I could see the benefit for the sector, of course—other than in just helping MSPs to be informed. However, by the end of that exchange, Mr Beattie had outlined some of that.

The Parliament is not very good at auditing whether cross-party groups actually fulfil their aspirations. That observation is not specific to this proposed cross-party group, but it feeds into the discussion that we will have later about cross-party groups more generally, so I want to put that on the record. The cross-party group that we have just discussed had some significant ambition, but, with all cross-party groups, we might have to look a little more carefully at whether they fulfil what they say that they want to achieve when they appear before this committee to seek recognition.

The Convener: You have certainly anticipated our later agenda item. Thank you for that.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As I always do whenever we consider an application from a cross-party group, I will simply place on record my view about the number of cross-party groups in the Parliament. I know that we are coming on to that, but I will continue to say it until I believe that we have resolved the issue, and I do not think that we have yet.

The Convener: As there are no further comments, does the committee agree to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group?

Members indicated agreement.

Correspondence

09:49

The Convener: Item 4 is correspondence that we have received from Graeme Dey MSP, in which he raises a number of concerns about parliamentary motions and how they are being used, particularly those that congratulate individuals or organisations. Do any members of the committee have any comments on that?

Edward Mountain: In the six years that I have been in Parliament, I have noticed exactly the same thing. I have also noticed the amount of time that it takes for motions to be approved and come back through from the Parliament, which suggests that there is a problem in resourcing the system, possibly in funding it, and with the number of motions.

It has changed. In the past, such motions were to congratulate groups and organisations, and now, although I am not saying that we have got to this level, in some cases we are almost at the level of congratulating somebody for baking a cake. I wonder whether that is what the system was proposed for.

We do need to look at this. It would be helpful to have views from people who have been members of the Parliament for longer than I have, to see whether they have noticed the same. Graeme Dey might also come to give evidence to the committee.

The Convener: That is helpful.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): Can I flip this around? I agree with Edward Mountain about the length of time that it takes for a motion to be approved. I am going to link this to CPGs, which is relevant to what we have been discussing today. I am a member of the CPG on medicinal cannabis, which is an issue that affects a constituent of mine. Given the evidence that was presented at that CPG, I lodged a motion and I got such strong support for it that it was the first time that I was able to lead a members' business debate in the chamber. That was really effective, and it is evidence of how effectively CPGs can work and how motions can take such issues forward.

Equally, some of the motions that have been lodged are particularly weak, and I strongly agree with Edward Mountain on that, as well as with Graeme Dey's letter.

The Convener: That is helpful.

Alexander Stewart: Graeme Dey makes some valid points about the structure and type of motions, but I also acknowledge that motions are

a great opportunity to highlight worthwhile causes. We just have to look at the amount of information that is transmitted to see that motions can be a way to recognise an individual and an organisation within a region or a constituency as well as nationally.

However, I acknowledge that there seems to have been an erosion of some of that and that it would be a better conclusion for everybody if there was a standard that members would be expected to always reach when lodging motions, and a level that goes below the bar, if a bar has to be produced to suggest what we would expect. That would be a useful guide for staff and MSPs. In reality, nine times out of 10, a staff member might be putting together the motion on behalf of the member, and that needs to be considered. A bit of training might be required when it comes to what researchers, communications officers and managers within the Parliament are trying to do.

All of that needs to be looked at, and, if we can capture that, it will be easier for everybody to manage the process.

Bob Doris: Mr Dey has dared to put on the record in the public domain something that many MSPs have been thinking for some time. That said, some MSPs who have been thinking it for some time might also be guilty, if that is not the wrong expression to use, of lodging motions about someone who wins a contest for baking a cake. Mr Mountain, I can tell that you have never tasted my cake. I will not be the subject of any such motion.

Mr Dey made a serious point, but there can be—there always are—unintended consequences. This Parliament needs to find a way to shine a light on remarkable people, at all levels of society, who do something worthwhile. Such people deserve to be commended, whether that happens in this Parliament or elsewhere.

Such commendation does not always have to come through a conventional motion of the Parliament. I know that some parliamentarians have ideas about various ways in which constituency and regional MSPs could use parliamentary mechanisms to shine a light on the remarkable people in our constituencies who deserve to be recognised. That recognition will not always come through a motion of the Parliament, but there should be some mechanism for it. If we are to review the situation, we must not block opportunities for members of this Parliament to recognise remarkable people, irrespective of whether they have contributed in a substantial way at a regional or national level or in a small or micro way that made a difference locally, in their community. With that in mind, I am keen to look at the issue in more detail and hear the ideas of parliamentarians and others.

If we are to look at motions, we might consider another way in which the nature of motions is changing. When I was first elected to the Parliament in 2007, motions for members' business debates tended to be consensual. They might be thought provoking and challenging, but they were rarely tribal in nature and they rarely involved playing out entrenched party positions. I feel that, in the past few years, such motions have, at times, set out much more entrenched positions. They have been much more tribal, with some MSPs seeking opportunities to play out entrenched party positions. I do not think that that was ever the intention behind members' business debates and the motions that are lodged in that regard.

If we are to look at the issue in more detail, we should consider the totality of motions. There are some wonderful members' business debates; there can be a great dynamic, with a fantastic debate on thought-provoking ideas, among members of all parties. We should not restrict such vibrant debate. However, there is a tendency for members' business debates to be tribal, which was not the intention behind such debates. We should look at motions and debates in the round.

Edward Mountain: I agree with Bob Doris. I have noticed a far more tribal approach to motions. The debates that are interesting are the ones in which members can inform themselves about an issue. There are issues about which I have no idea, but I will volunteer to speak in a debate on such an issue, because the debate will inform me about what is going on. Those are the useful motions: they highlight in the Parliament important things that are going on.

I agree with Bob that some motions that are lodged for members' business debates are purely political. I think that that is wrong, but it probably reflects frustration about the lack of ability to debate such matters in other parliamentary time.

We should have members' business debates not to make political points but to inform debate. The reason for such debates is to inform us and sometimes celebrate things that are going on.

I echo Bob's views. We should have a wider inquiry into all those things and consider costings—that is important. We have all found ourselves settling down at 9 o'clock in the evening only to have a heap of motions flood into our inboxes—sometimes there are six motions from just one person. I am not saying that such motions are meaningless, but flooding members' inboxes with six motions on quite minor issues is not a way to get parliamentarians informed or involved in processes.

10:00

The Convener: All of those contributions were helpful. Graeme Dey's letter, for which I thank him, is specifically about motions that simply seek MSPs' support, rather than motions that are intended to go forward to a members' business debate. However, I am cognisant of what members said. There seems to be an unspoken—or, rather, quietly spoken—concern among MSPs, and I think that committee members agree that they want to give the matter further consideration. Are members content for a short paper to be drafted that seeks costings and information, so that we can put parameters on our inquiry? I noted the comment about seeking the wisdom of more experienced members who have been here over a number of sessions; we could ask them to give us, at the very least, their subjective opinions of changes when it comes to motions and debates. That would be helpful.

Are members content for such a paper to be prepared and then considered at a subsequent meeting?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I am grateful.

Cross-Party Group Annual Report

The Convener: Agenda item 5 is consideration of the annual update on cross-party group compliance with the code of conduct. Members have received the annual monitoring report, which provides, for each cross-party group that this committee has recognised, a green, yellow, red or blue code in relation to a variety of requirements with which the group should comply. Who wants to kick off with a comment or opinion on what they have seen in the report?

Edward Mountain: I do not want to kick off; I want to have a reasoned discussion. Ever since becoming a member of this committee, I have voiced concerns about the amount of work that cross-party groups require from MSPs. In trying to support CPGs, some MSPs take on a huge number of responsibilities, and some feel pressurised into doing so. New members sometimes get themselves into a situation in which they are on several cross-party groups and cannot give any group their full attention.

The chart in the report is extremely interesting. The vast majority of groups are green-lighted—if that is the right description—in that they comply with the rules, but a significant number have one or more yellow warning lights and some have one or more red stop lights.

We need to do more work to consider how to resolve the problem. My gut feeling is that, if a group has two red lights, that is a clear indication that we need to ask whether it is fulfilling its role. The same applies if a group has two yellow lights and a red light.

I do not propose to go through the list—members can do that for themselves and come to their own decisions—but my view is that the committee has a role in helping cross-party groups to decide whether they have a future. We should be forthright in our questioning. We should encourage groups to fulfil the requirements, but, if they cannot do so, we should suggest to them that they drop out.

I say for the record that I do not want my comments to be taken as meaning that I am against all cross-party groups: I am not. I convene two cross-party groups and I give them my entire attention and work hard on them. A lot of MSPs work hard on cross-party groups. However, could I be a member of three, four, five or—as is sometimes the case—10 cross-party groups? I would struggle. I will leave it there.

The Convener: That was helpful.

Alexander Stewart: As Edward has indicated, time is precious for MSPs, but we have spoken

about the need for cross-party groups on a number of occasions in the past and there are some very worthwhile groups. CPGs provide a great opportunity to ensure that the Parliament recognises and supports many organisations and individuals. However, there are issues when it comes to workforce, timing, the focus of the groups and parliamentary business, all of which have an impact on cross-party groups. I am a co-convener of three cross-party groups, and I know how much time that takes. I need to ensure that I manage my work-life balance in order to do that work.

I am concerned about the number of yellow and red warning lights that appear in the annual monitoring report, because that is a red light to us that there is a problem. The problem might well be related to timing, work focus and parliamentary business. The presence of warning lights might be an indication that the cross-party group has run its course and needs to be re-thought, if it is to continue. It is important for us to analyse some of the groups in question and to consider their focus and procedures, if they have got to that stage.

There is also the discussion about how many cross-party groups' remits overlap, which can dilute their work. Maybe we do not need three groups that cover one area each but one group that deals with that whole area. The report is a useful document, but there is a lot more work to be done to ensure that we get the best out of the CPG system. As I said, I am a great supporter of cross-party groups, as many members are, but they need to be relevant and progressive and must fulfil the standard that we set in the committee and the Parliament. If they are not doing that, they need to be looked at.

Bob Doris: I made some comments to Mr Beattie earlier in the meeting. I felt a bit guilty about that, because I have a very direct constituency interest in the cross-party group on space being successful, given the employment that the space industry creates and the dynamic in my constituency for the space sector, which is growing. However, I wanted to challenge and push a bit on whether we should approve the cross-party group—not because it is a cross-party group on space, but because there has been a feeling for years, and before the session 6 standards committee was in place, that the committee was a conveyor belt when it came to accepting cross-party group applications and looking at compliance. That is how it has always been. Clearly, that must now stop.

Some new structures need to be put in place. I commend the clerking team for providing this visual aid to let us know what is going on across all the cross-party groups in Parliament. We probably need to build up additional structures

around the way that we scrutinise the compliance of cross-party groups. We need to be consistent and systematic in how we approach that, so that no one cross-party group feels that it has been unfairly targeted for lack of compliance.

We need to have a review of how the system is monitored and how cross-party groups that are not compliant are supported to be compliant. We might also need to have some slightly more challenging conversations about whether a group has, in effect, fallen into abeyance and whether the best way forward is for it to limp on—I hate that expression—or whether it is better for MSPs to reconsolidate their efforts and consider the best use of their time.

The Convener: That is helpful, and it is right to say that a significant number of the CPGs have complied with their regulatory requirements. Indeed, there are CPGs that have not got to the stage when they would have been expected to do their annual return that have complied with all the requirements. We have already withdrawn recognition from one CPG this year for failure to meet the requirements, and that is noted in the report.

For the purposes of the annual review, would the committee be content for me, as convener, to write to all cross-party groups? I would thank those that have complied and, for those that have not complied, I would highlight where they have fallen short and the outcomes that could follow unless they rectify their regulatory failure—I was interested to hear Mr Beattie talking about regulatory requirements—and would ask them to explain why they have been unable to comply. I know that a number of events have had to be cancelled because of chamber commitments.

If the committee is happy for me to write to the cross-party groups in those terms, I think that that would be a way to take forward the annual monitoring report, which is an excellent piece of work—I echo Bob Doris's comments on that. I would draw the report to the attention of all CPGs so that they can see how they are doing. It is very quick for members to find an individual CPG that they are involved in to see whether it has complied with the requirements.

Edward Mountain: I totally agree with that suggestion. In that letter, could you be quite firm in saying that we will continue to look at the matter? You might also offer CPGs that have not complied the opportunity to consider whether they wish to withdraw the group. As an MSP, once you get tied into a group, it is really difficult to say, "Maybe this isn't working." If you give those groups the opportunity to consider withdrawing, that might be useful to some members of those groups.

The Convener: That is very helpful.

To echo Bob Doris's remarks about asking Colin Beattie pressing questions, there is an obligation on MSPs to ask such questions. Sometimes, we may need to save MSPs from themselves. I will certainly put in my letter that, should a CPG have come to the end of what it sought to achieve, it is possible for the convener of the group to write to us so that the group can, in essence, be de-recognised and its obligations can be removed.

Bob Doris: I did not say in my contribution, but I am very pleased that you did, that most cross-party groups are compliant and meet all the requirements. That might have got a bit lost in my comments, so I am pleased that you put that on the record. I expect that most cross-party groups are compliant because they have exceptional secretariats that support them, which, by and large, are unpaid and are doing sterling work. It is important to recognise that.

I think that the committee is in agreement that we should write to conveners. I do not know whether it would also be appropriate to write to the associated secretariats with the same correspondence. It is a horrible thing to say, convener, but I want to make sure that the secretariats are sighted on these matters at the earliest opportunity, particularly if a cross-party group is not compliant.

The Convener: That is common sense at its best. I will write to the conveners of the cross-party groups because, as MSPs, they are the individuals who have undertaken to comply with the requirements. However, it makes sense to make sure that the secretariats, where they are identified, are also aware of the situation, because of the good work that a lot of them do.

Almost from day 1, the committee has been concerned about CPGs. The issue is discussed by MSPs. At their very best, CPGs fulfil an incredibly valuable function in the Parliament, as they allow people, industries, charities, the third sector and communities in Scotland to reach out and speak to specific MSPs in order to seek their help and assistance or simply to give them information. However, the annual report shows that there are warning lights on the dashboard, which it would be wrong for us to ignore.

If the committee is happy, I will write to all CPGs, as well as their supporting secretariats, to congratulate those that have complied. For those that have not, I will seek an explanation and an undertaking that they will put right the defects as soon as possible. Are members content with that suggestion?

Members indicated agreement.

10:13

Meeting continued in private until 11:14.

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