



The Scottish Parliament Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Vol. 1, No. 50 Session 4

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 2 February 2012

Note: (DT) signifies a decision taken at Decision Time.

The meeting opened at 9.15 am.

1. College Funding: Liz Smith moved S4M-01876—That the Parliament warmly congratulates Scotland’s colleges in terms of the outstanding contribution that they have made to improving educational opportunities for a wide range of learners, improving the alignment between available skills and local employment opportunities and in embracing the need for structural reform; condemns the Scottish Government for forcing on the sector deeply damaging financial cuts for the period 2012-15, which are disproportionately greater in 2012-13, and which will inevitably have a detrimental impact on staffing, student places and support for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds; fails to understand how these financial cuts can be reconciled with the Scottish Government’s flagship 16 to 19 policy and the need to address the very worrying youth unemployment statistics that have revealed that 88,000 young people aged 18 to 24 are now out of work, and calls on the Scottish Government to urgently reconsider the proposed budget settlement for the further education sector.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell) moved amendment S4M-01876.1 to motion S4M-01876—

Leave out from “condemns” to end and insert—

“acknowledges the difficulties resulting from the UK Government’s cuts of over £3 billion to the Scottish block and the inescapable pressures that this creates for college budgets; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government is ensuring that £265 million of capital investment in colleges is made over the spending review period, including through the non-

profit distributing programme; further recognises that the support is in place to maintain student numbers in the coming year; commends the hard work and commitment of college staff and students at all levels, both to improve learner outcomes and to take forward the progressive programme of reform set in train by the Scottish Government, including its plans for a regional structure in which learning provision is better matched to need, and reiterates its support for the creation of 125,000 modern apprenticeships over the current parliamentary session and for the introduction of the Opportunities for All programme, which will provide a suitable place in learning or training for all 16 to 19-year-olds who require it.”

After debate, the amendment was agreed to ((DT) by division: For 63, Against 52, Abstentions 0).

The motion as amended was then agreed to ((DT) by division: For 63, Against 52, Abstentions 0).

Accordingly, the Parliament resolved—That the Parliament warmly congratulates Scotland’s colleges in terms of the outstanding contribution that they have made to improving educational opportunities for a wide range of learners, improving the alignment between available skills and local employment opportunities and in embracing the need for structural reform; acknowledges the difficulties resulting from the UK Government’s cuts of over £3 billion to the Scottish block and the inescapable pressures that this creates for college budgets; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government is ensuring that £265 million of capital investment in colleges is made over the spending review period, including through the non-profit distributing programme; further recognises that the support is in place to maintain student numbers in the coming year; commends the hard work and commitment of college staff and students at all levels, both to improve learner outcomes and to take forward the progressive programme of reform set in train by the Scottish Government, including its plans for a regional structure in which learning provision is better matched to need, and reiterates its support for the creation of 125,000 modern apprenticeships over the current parliamentary session and for the introduction of the Opportunities for All programme, which will provide a suitable place in learning or training for all 16 to 19-year-olds who require it.

2. Prison Visiting Committees: Annabel Goldie moved S4M-01878—That the Parliament notes with concern the Scottish Government’s proposals to abolish prison visiting committees and replace them with a prisoner advocacy service; considers that the independent scrutiny of prison conditions through regular, unannounced inspections and the independent examination of prisoner complaints is an important check and balance for the prison system; believes that, as they provide regular external scrutiny, are appointed from the local community and are independent from the Scottish Prison Service, prison visiting committees provide a distinct but complementary role to Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons; notes that the Scottish Government’s consultation on the independent monitoring of prisons, which was carried out in 2011, did not include proposals for an advocacy service to replace the committees and that 59 out of 60 respondents to the consultation wanted to retain the independent oversight role that it considers the committees fulfil; further notes that, in 2005, a review of the committees recommended that they be re-established as independent monitoring boards and that there should be changes to improve their impact and consistency; understands that, on 22 December 2011, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice said that the cost of running the committees was less than that

anticipated for the proposed advocacy service, and believes that prison visiting committees offer excellent value for money, that they should be retained and that the proposed prisoner advocacy service should complement, but not replace, their role.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill) moved amendment S4M-01878.1 to motion S4M-01878—

Leave out from “notes with concern” to end and insert—

“recognises the dedication and commitment of volunteer members of prison visiting committees but considers that, since the role and remit of the committees were designed in the 19th century, it is necessary now to develop an appropriate service fit for the 21st century; further notes that complaints by prisoners are now dealt with by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) in line with best practice as set out by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman’s Complaints Standards Authority; notes that, on monitoring, the chief executive of the SPS is accountable to the Scottish Ministers for compliance with legislation on the management and treatment of prisoners and that inspection of prisons is being delivered efficiently and effectively by HM Inspectorate of Prisons; further notes that research has identified that prisoners need a dedicated advocacy service that could provide them with independent advice and support; notes that the Scottish Government is considering how to build on the role performed presently by visiting committees by introducing a dedicated independent prisoner advocacy service to support prisoners in ways that match modern needs, and notes that the Scottish Government intends to carry out a further public consultation on these proposals in 2012 and will discuss the proposed timetable with stakeholders in developing the best way forward.”

After debate, the amendment was agreed to ((DT) by division: For 63, Against 52, Abstentions 0).

The motion as amended was then agreed to ((DT) by division: For 62, Against 38, Abstentions 14).

Accordingly, the Parliament resolved—That the Parliament recognises the dedication and commitment of volunteer members of prison visiting committees but considers that, since the role and remit of the committees were designed in the 19th century, it is necessary now to develop an appropriate service fit for the 21st century; further notes that complaints by prisoners are now dealt with by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) in line with best practice as set out by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman’s Complaints Standards Authority; notes that, on monitoring, the chief executive of the SPS is accountable to the Scottish Ministers for compliance with legislation on the management and treatment of prisoners and that inspection of prisons is being delivered efficiently and effectively by HM Inspectorate of Prisons; further notes that research has identified that prisoners need a dedicated advocacy service that could provide them with independent advice and support; notes that the Scottish Government is considering how to build on the role performed presently by visiting committees by introducing a dedicated independent prisoner advocacy service to support prisoners in ways that match modern needs, and notes that the Scottish Government intends to carry out a further public consultation on these proposals in 2012 and will discuss the proposed timetable with stakeholders in developing the best way forward.

3. General Question Time: Questions were answered by Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers.

4. First Minister's Question Time: Questions were answered by the First Minister (Alex Salmond).

5. Themed Question Time: Questions on Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth were answered by the Cabinet Secretary and Ministers.

6. Scotland's Next Generation Broadband Infrastructure Plan: The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil) moved S4M-01893— That the Parliament welcomes the publication of *Scotland's Digital Future - Infrastructure Action Plan* and the commitment to world class, future-proofed infrastructure that will deliver digital connectivity across the whole of Scotland by 2020; recognises that putting this infrastructure in place will make a real difference to the way people in Scotland live and work, including how they access public services; agrees that achieving the ambition will require the Scottish Government to work in partnership with local authorities to deliver committed and coordinated action across the whole of Scotland; calls on the private sector to work in partnership with the public sector to deliver open access future-proofed infrastructure and to support measures to increase take-up and participation in the digital economy, and calls on the UK Government to make available the right levels of funding to meet the challenges of delivering infrastructure in rural and remote areas of Scotland, to ensure that mobile 2G and 3G not spots are addressed in Scotland and that the roll-out of 4G in Scotland at least matches the UK average.

Richard Baker moved amendment S4M-01893.1 to motion S4M-01893—

Insert at end—

“, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that local and community projects receive an adequate share of the available funding and to develop strategies to improve broadband uptake among people over 55 and low-income groups who are currently excluded from the benefits of broadband access.”

After debate, the amendment was agreed to (DT).

Mary Scanlon moved amendment S4M-01893.2 to motion S4M-01893—

Leave out from “local authorities” to “funding” and insert—

“the UK Government, local authorities and the public and private sectors to deliver open access future-proofed infrastructure and to support measures to increase take-up and participation in the digital economy and”.

After debate, the amendment was disagreed to ((DT) by division: For 17, Against 96, Abstentions 2).

The motion as amended was then agreed to ((DT) by division: For 101, Against 0, Abstentions 14).

Accordingly, the Parliament resolved—That the Parliament welcomes the publication of *Scotland's Digital Future - Infrastructure Action Plan* and the commitment to world class, future-proofed infrastructure that will deliver digital connectivity across the whole of Scotland by 2020; recognises that putting this infrastructure in place will make a real difference to the way people in Scotland live and work, including how they access public services; agrees that achieving the ambition will require the Scottish Government to work in partnership with local authorities to deliver committed and coordinated action across the whole of Scotland; calls on the private sector to work in partnership with the public sector to deliver open access future-proofed infrastructure and to support measures to increase take-up and participation in the digital economy, and calls on the UK Government to make available the right levels of funding to meet the challenges of delivering infrastructure in rural and remote areas of Scotland, to ensure that mobile 2G and 3G not spots are addressed in Scotland and that the roll-out of 4G in Scotland at least matches the UK average, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that local and community projects receive an adequate share of the available funding and to develop strategies to improve broadband uptake among people over 55 and low-income groups who are currently excluded from the benefits of broadband access.

7. Suspension and Variation of Standing Orders: Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, moved S4M-01900—That the Parliament agrees that Rule 6.11(a)(i) be suspended for the purpose of consideration between 2 February 2012 and 29 June 2012 of any orders requiring the consent of the Parliament under section 9 of the Public Bodies Act 2011 and that the following alternative provision be substituted for that purpose—

“(i) subordinate legislation laid before the Parliament or requiring the consent of the Parliament under section 9 of the Public Bodies Act 2011;”

The motion was agreed to (DT).

8. Decision Time: The Parliament took decisions on items 1, 2 6 and 7 as noted above.

9. Assistance Dogs are Working Dogs Too: The Parliament debated S4M-01655 in the name of Linda Fabiani—That the Parliament notes that, under current VAT legislation, food for assistance dogs is not VAT exempt but that food for other working dogs, such as sheepdogs and greyhounds, is; notes that working dogs' food is exempt as they require a high-protein diet but that such a diet is not appropriate for assistance dogs as they work in a different manner; considers that, where a charitable organisation, such as Guide Dogs Scotland, which works with clients in East Kilbride and across Scotland, was to supply food for assistance dogs from donations, an exemption from VAT would result in significant savings, which could be used to assist its client group, and believes that this issue could be easily resolved to the benefit of relevant charitable organisations and individual owners who feed their own assistance dogs.

The meeting closed at 5.37 pm.

P E Grice
Clerk of the Parliament
2 February 2012

Appendix
(Note: this Appendix does not form part of the Minutes)

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