

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, January 15, 2019

Committee Room

Organizational/Agenda-Setting

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Mr. Keith Irving, Chairman
Ms. Rafah DiCostanzo, Vice-Chairman
Mr. Ben Jessome
Mr. Bill Horne
Mr. Gordon Wilson
Mr. Keith Bain
Mr. Larry Harrison
Ms. Lenore Zann
Ms. Susan Leblanc

[Mr. Brad Johns replaced Mr. Keith Bain]
[Ms. Claudia Chender replaced Ms. Susan Leblanc]

In Attendance:

Mrs. Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2019

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Keith Irving

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. I'd like to call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Community Services to order. This is the first meeting in the new year with a new committee and committee membership. I'd like to introduce myself: Keith Irving, MLA for Kings South. I'll be chairing this committee for the foreseeable future.

I'd like to ask members of the committee to state their name and their constituency to get started. We have been advised that Ms. Zann will not be joining us here today. Let's begin, perhaps, with Mr. Wilson.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you and welcome everyone. Just before we get started, I thought I would review the mandate of this standing committee that has been reconstituted with a slightly different mandate. I'll just convey that here today: the Community Services Committee is established with a purpose of considering matters relative to community services, culture, heritage, human rights, municipal affairs, and recreation and sports. That just helps us keep on topic, as per the direction of the Legislature.

As well, we've all been at this table many times, but this is always a good opportunity in a new year just to review our roles and the operations of the committee. None of this is new but I just want to confirm with the committee that we'd like to proceed in this way.

I view my job as Chair as ensuring the orderly movement of the committee through the agenda, keeping us on topic and on time, and also to do my best to ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to ask questions. Normally this committee has worked like many of the other standing committees just by indicating to me that you wish to ask questions. I'll do my best to ensure that everyone gets at least an opportunity to ask one question, so I'll be using my judgment on that.

We'll proceed with a main question and one supplementary, at least for the first round. Then on second round, depending on time, we'll not have supplementary questions. If that's agreed with the committee, we'll proceed that way.

Also, I'd like to remind committee members to address their questions through the Chair and wait to be acknowledged by the Chair. I know some of us sometimes get into conversations and really, with respect to Hansard and the difficult job they've got, I'd like to do my best to enforce that procedural item of waiting to be acknowledged as we go back and forth between the witnesses and questions from the committee.

Unless there are any concerns or questions over that, I'll do my best to stick with those procedures as I've outlined. Certainly, if you have any questions or concerns during the workings of this committee in the year to come, please come see me.

The main purpose of today's meeting is an agenda-setting meeting to set out the next six topics that this committee will be looking at. Each caucus has submitted suggestions for topics and we will have, as usual, three topics from the Liberal caucus, two from the PC caucus, and one from the NDP caucus.

I will now turn it over to the committee to put forward motions with respect to committee topics. Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. RAFAH DICOSTANZO: For the Business and Community ACCESS-Ability Grants, I would like the witness to be Natasha Jackson from Communities, Culture and Heritage. This is the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. DICOSTANZO: Poverty reduction grants, and the witnesses will be Bonnie Ste-Croix and Brandon Grant from the Department of Community Services.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions or concerns? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. DICOSTANZO: Career Rising program, and the witnesses will be Joy Knight and Brandon Grant, again from the Department of Community Services.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions or comments? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I just want to make one quick comment. It's a procedural thing more than anything, and it's an apology on top of that. Typically, when we submit our agenda items, we always add who we would suggest as a witness. Our apologies for failing to do that on this side. Typically, it's somebody senior within the department who can add to that topic. I just wanted to put that comment on the record.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do the PCs want to suggest a topic? Mr. Harrison.

MR. LARRY HARRISON: Department of Community Services, re: employment supports for income assistance recipients.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you have any suggested witnesses or are you just leaving it to the department?

MR. HARRISON: No, I don't, leaving it to the department.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions? Mr. Wilson.

MR. WILSON: Could I have that again? Which one was that?

MR. HARRISON: It's the employment supports for income assistance recipients.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Mr. Wilson.

MR. WILSON: I'll be a stickler again, but who is the witness for that? Did I hear?

MR. CHAIRMAN: He's referring it to the department to bring a suggested witness forward.

Would I have another motion from the PC caucus? Mr. Harrison.

MR. HARRISON: The Department of Community Services and Department of Internal Services, the protection of confidential information.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ms. Chender from the NDP caucus, you have one topic. Would you like to suggest one?

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: Yes, I would like to put forward legal issues in child protection witnesses, and our suggested witness is Professor Rollie Thompson.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. WILSON: Sorry, I missed having a chance to mention it to you before, but would it be appropriate, would you mind, if we had Leonard Doiron from the Department of Community Services come in also with him?

MS. CHENDER: Yes, that's fine.

MR. WILSON: If that's the case, could I ask you to amend your motion?

MS. CHENDER: I'll amend my motion that we would like to submit legal issues in child protection witnesses, and the witnesses for that would be Professor Rollie Thompson and Leonard Doiron from the Department of Community Services.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Great. Are there any further questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

That concludes our agenda setting. You'll notice on the document there were also some requests for information to the previous committee in correspondence that we'll address momentarily.

Just going forward in terms of meeting times, traditionally this committee has met on the first Tuesday of the month between 10:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. Is the committee in agreement that we shall continue that practice? I don't see any heads nodding or shaking.

MR. WILSON: If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, then we're in agreement as a committee to meet the first Tuesday of the month at 10:00 a.m.

The committee has also previously agreed to have submissions and presentations one week in advance and to post them on the committee's website following a meeting. Are the members still in agreement with this process? No concerns. All right, we will continue to proceed in that way.

The third question, I have a request here from the clerk of the committee with respect to articles that have been received, numerous articles from Mr. Kendall Worth. The clerk has asked that perhaps these articles be submitted directly to members, rather than through the committee and going through all the registering in the database of these articles. The clerk is asking whether it's acceptable to have those articles submitted directly to the members. Are there any concerns? Ms. Chender.

MS. CHENDER: Just a procedural question. So that would mean that they wouldn't get registered, but they would be directly distributed if they're received by the clerk?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Henry.

MRS. DARLENE HENRY (Legislative Committee Clerk): What it is, every time we receive an article, we have to record that into our database, which is really taking up quite a bit of space because it is a document coming through the Committees Office. Instead of us doing that, what would happen is either give Mr. Worth your government email addresses - not your private ones - and he can direct that directly to you and then you can do with it as you wish, instead of us trying to house such a large - it's taking up a lot of space. We have only so much in the database that we need for - if it's an ask, that's fine, but if it's just a newspaper article, it's taking up a lot of room.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. WILSON: To that point, would there still be an official record that would be held with the committee clerk, the topic of the article and that it was received from him and was sent to us, just the topic, to have it on record?

MRS. HENRY: No, it's just a newspaper article, a subscription that he's going to send to you. It's not an official document per se.

MR. WILSON: I understand.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions? Is it agreed then that the clerk will provide our emails and we'll receive those directly? It seems to be efficient, it's still getting the information to us. Again, we as MLAs receive information this way from many constituents throughout the province.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed. Thank you very much.

Okay, the other thing I want to wrap up here for the new committee is because of prorogation last September, all work of the committee then dies. But we do have the option, as a committee, to at least receive the correspondence that was sent to the previous committee. There are four pieces of correspondence which are in your package and if it's the wish of the committee, I could entertain a motion to accept past correspondence received by the previous committee. Mr. Wilson.

MR. WILSON: I move that we accept the receipt of previous correspondence to the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments or questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried. Thank you very much.

The last item I think we need to cover off is the committee report - the 2017-18 report technically dies upon prorogation, as well, but the committee may wish to accept that report. A suggestion has been made by the clerk to authorize the Chair to sign that report and present it to the House, as opposed to all of you needing to sign that as new committee members. If that is of interest to the committee, I would entertain a motion. Mr. Wilson.

MR. WILSON: I'd like to make that motion, but I'd also like to request that the report be circulated as soon as possible. It would be nice to have a look at it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would you like to review the report before putting a motion on the floor? Or you are prepared to put the motion forward?

[10:15 a.m.]

MR. WILSON: I would say that would be up to the committee. These reports are pretty standard. I'd kind of like to see a copy of it, that's all. I'll make a motion that we accept that, that we give the Chair the ability to sign that report on behalf of the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Any discussion or questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I think we've covered everything. Is there anything I've missed? Ms. Chender.

MS. CHENDER: You may have been just getting to this, Mr. Chairman, but under the request to appear, I note that Mr. Worth has requested several times to appear before this committee with the Benefits Reform Action Group. I see they were told that someone from the department would meet with them.

I think in his response to Ms. DiCostanzo's letter he was clear that that was not what they were interested in. I would suggest that the volumes of correspondence this committee receives from Mr. Worth, which we just discussed, are related to the fact that he would like the opportunity to appear here.

I'm not sure how many meetings we have or how that relates to the topics we've approved, but I would suggest - in his letter, I think he still is requesting a meeting with this group or alternately, he suggests that this group request a witness from the department to give an update on transformation. I don't see why we wouldn't do that. Both of those seem squarely within the purview of the committee. In fact, perhaps we could hear those two together.

I think when we talk about a program or a department, like the Department of Community Services, I mean that is set up to serve the most vulnerable Nova Scotians and we have a group of organized Nova Scotians from those marginalized communities who have organized themselves and just want the opportunity to speak to this committee. Respectfully, I would submit that we ought to give them that opportunity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. WILSON: Personally, I don't see any reason why Mr. Worth wouldn't come before the committee, but more importantly, I would suggest that if any of the caucuses feel that he is an appropriate witness for them to bring forward in an agenda setting that that would be - that's typically the normal process for bringing witnesses forward.

We have our priorities for our witnesses and maybe at the next agenda setting, if that's one of the topics that you'd like to have, that would be a good route to have him here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Chender.

MS. CHENDER: As Mr. Wilson knows, the NDP caucus is allowed to submit one topic per agenda setting, which isn't to say that we would love to submit 20 topics. So notwithstanding that that is the normal procedure, just putting that aside for a second, again I don't know the number of meetings that this will cover, but my suggestion is simply that if there is an additional slot that essentially the Benefits Reform Action Group could sort

of be on deck as an alternate topic, should there be the opportunity. They are self-advocating - our caucus certainly has met with them, so that's my suggestion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Just for the committee members' knowledge, Mr. Worth has met with the committee numerous times, so I think our procedure here is three, two, and one. I think we've gone through that.

I think if the NDP caucus, if it's a priority, that you would then bring that forward in the next agenda setting. Are there any other comments? All right, thank you.

With that, I'd like a motion to adjourn until the next meeting date, which would be Tuesday, February 5th, at 10:00 a.m. (Interruptions)

I've been informed I can adjourn without a motion. The meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:20 a.m.]