Equal Opportunities Committee

3rd Report, 2013 (Session 4)

Annual Report 2012-13

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Equal Opportunities Committee

Remit and membership

Remit:

1. The remit of the Equal Opportunities Committee is to consider and report on matters relating to equal opportunities and upon the observance of equal opportunities within the Parliament.

2. In these Rules, “equal opportunities” includes the prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons on grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions.”

*(Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament, Rule 6.9)*

Membership:

Mary Fee (Convener)
Marco Biagi (from 18 September 2012) (Deputy Convener from 8 November 2012)
John Finnie
Annabel Goldie (until 16 January 2013)
Alex Johnstone (from 17 January 2013)
John Mason (from 30 October 2012)
Siobhan McMahon
Stuart McMillan (Deputy Convener) (until 18 September 2012)
Dennis Robertson
Jean Urquhart (until 26 October 2012) (Deputy Convener from 20 September 2012)

Committee Clerking Team:

Clerk
Douglas Thornton

Assistant Clerk
Ailsa Kilpatrick
Equal Opportunities Committee

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The Committee reports to the Parliament as follows—

Introduction

1. This report covers the Equal Opportunities Committee’s work in the second year of the parliamentary session, from 11 May 2012 to 10 May 2013.

Reports and inquiries

Having and keeping a home: steps to preventing homelessness among young people

2. We took oral evidence in November 2011 to inform our youth homelessness inquiry remit. We then agreed to explore what existing practice in local authorities and other agencies was effective in preventing youth homelessness. We also sought to identify gaps in preventative service provision and to establish how they could be closed.

3. Our call for written evidence received 18 responses. We met young people with direct experience of homelessness, or at risk of becoming homeless, around Scotland in spring 2012. We took oral evidence in June 2012 and published our report in September 2012.¹ A response was received from the Scottish Government on 3 December 2012.²

Gypsy/Travellers and care

4. Our first oral evidence session took place in March 2012 and looked into the differences between Gypsy/Travellers’ and others’ experience of care. Sessions in May and June 2013 built on this subject, with Gypsy/Travellers’ own accounts and

² Scottish Government response to Having and Keeping a Home: steps to preventing homelessness among young people. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/12-12-03_Margaret_Burgess_MSP_Minister_for_Housing_and_Welfare.pdf [Accessed 30 May 2013].
Evidence from social work and healthcare services. We published our report in September 2012.\(^3\)

**Where Gypsy/Travellers live**

5. To inform the remit of our inquiry into Gypsy/Traveller accommodation and to maximise engagement with Gypsy/Traveller people, taking account of the varying accommodation types, we—

- set a longer timetable than usual;
- promoted the call for evidence with a leaflet and a video (available on YouTube, on the Parliament’s website and on DVD);
- promoted the option to give telephone evidence; and,
- disseminated the call for evidence through social networking and word-of-mouth, including service providers and Gypsy/Travellers.

6. Our call for written evidence received 51 responses, with 8 pieces of supplementary evidence. The majority of the evidence was written, and 5 submissions were transcribed. We also sponsored an event hosted by a voluntary organisation working with Gypsy/Traveller carers, MECOPP, which coincided with the launch of both inquiries.

7. We visited Gypsy/Traveller sites in Edinburgh (North Cairntow), Dalkeith (Old Dalkeith Colliery), Perth (Double Dykes), Pitlochry (Bobbin Mill), Lochgilphead (Duncholgan) and Oban (Ledaig) prior to taking oral evidence in December 2012 and in January and February 2013. We also held a formal Committee meeting, organised jointly with Grampian Regional Equality Council, at Clinterty Travelling Person’s Site near Aberdeen in February 2013. This was the first time a committee has met on a Travelling Person’s site, and allowed the unique opportunity for Gypsy/Travellers, the police, NHS and voluntary organisations to give evidence at the same time. Our report was published in March 2013.\(^4\)

**Women and work**

8. We agreed to undertake an inquiry into Women and work in September 2011.

Building up to the inquiry, we—

- held a round-table session during Trade Union Week (February 2012);
- led the Parliament in a debate on Women and Work (June 2012);
- attended and followed the Scottish Government’s summit on women and employment (September 2012); and,

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\(^3\) Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee. 3rd Report 2012 (Session 4). *Gypsy/Travellers and Care* (SP Paper 184).

focused on gender as part of our scrutiny the Draft Budget 2013-14 (October/November 2012).

9. We then issued a call for written evidence, which received 57 responses. The three key issues highlighted – occupational segregation, flexible working and childcare – formed the basis of oral evidence sessions held in March, April and May 2013. We will take evidence from the Minister for Youth Employment in late May 2013 and hope to publish our report in June 2013.

Bills

10. No bills were referred to the Committee during the parliamentary year.

Scottish statutory instruments

11. No Scottish statutory instruments were received during the parliamentary year.

Petitions

12. In 2012/13 the Committee considered four petitions.

13. Petition PE1169: by Margaret Forbes, on behalf of Scottish Women Against Pornography, calling for tighter measures regarding the display of magazines and newspapers with sexually graphic covers. We agreed to write to the Scottish Government and the National Federation of Retail Newsagents (NFRN), as well as the UK Government, to seek clarification on the action being taken. On the basis that new guidelines had been published by the NFRN, and on-going work was being undertaken at a UK level, we agreed on 9 May 2013 to refer the petition back to Public Petitions Committee, asking that the issue be monitored.

14. Petition PE1372: by Duncan McLaren, on behalf of Friends of the Earth Scotland, on whether access to the Scottish courts is compliant with the Aarhus convention on ‘Access to Justice in Environmental Matters’. Following the publication of a Scottish Government consultation and a further submission from the petitioner relating to the consultation, we wrote to the Scottish Government and the Law Society of Scotland. On 9 May 2013, we agreed to return to the petition in late 2013 or early 2014 once an update on progress has been provided by Friends of the Earth.

15. Petition PE1411: by Luca Scarabello, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reform school uniform policies by stopping gender-specific uniforms and changing clothes worn for uniforms to more comfortable, less physical-restrictive, more affordable and practical garments. We noted that schools have a responsibility to comply with equalities legislation by adjusting school uniform policies, where needed. We also noted that local authorities were responsible for schools’ compliance with legislation, and agreed to close the petition.

16. Petition PE1413: by Amy King, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make no changes to the current definition of marriage, as
being a union between one man and one woman, regardless of what happens in Westminster. We wrote to the Scottish Government in December 2012 drawing their attention to the petition and agreed to consider it again following the introduction of forthcoming legislation on marriage.

**Budget scrutiny and process 2013-14**

17. To inform our inquiry into women and work, we agreed to emphasize gender in our approach to scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2013-14. The emphasis complemented previous work, highlighting both the economic costs of the continued situation regarding unequal pay in local authorities, and the cost to the public purse of persistent patterns of occupational segregation in the context of the Modern Apprenticeship programme.

18. We conducted a survey on the role of equalities in the budgeting process across public sector organisations. We asked local authorities, NHS boards, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, VisitScotland and Transport Scotland about—

- the role of equalities in the budgeting process undertaken in their organisation;
- the equalities impact of mainstream services (services that are available to all groups, including equalities groups);
- the equalities impact of any services specifically designed for equalities groups; and,
- progress in mainstreaming equalities and how impact is monitored.

19. In the interests of mainstreaming, we wrote to other committees involved in budget scrutiny to ask each to make a short report setting out their findings relating to equalities in the draft-budget scrutiny.

20. We submitted our report to the Finance Committee on 10 December 2012.⁵

**Equalities**

21. Each meeting opened with introductions from members and witnesses, and greater emphasis was placed on using concise, plain English in papers and reports. A newsletter was issued regularly, available in various formats to meet readers’ accessibility needs. We also adopted a variety of approaches to maximise engagement with our call for written evidence on ‘Where Gypsy/Travellers Live’ (see paragraph 7).

22. A summary of our recommendations in the *Where Gypsy/Travellers Live* report was published in ‘glossy’ format, making use of images and quotes gathered during the inquiry. It was brought to the attention of stakeholders via our

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newsletter and Twitter feed, resulting in many stakeholders taking up the offer of having copies posted out to them for distribution.

23. A summary version of our report to the Finance Committee on the Draft Budget 2013-14 was produced, outlining key points in a stand-alone, more accessible alternative to the standard report.

24. We held a ‘Meet-the-Committee’ event in February 2013 as an informal opportunity to meet us. The event was well-attended and feedback received was very positive; there is a waiting list for future events. The event was open to anybody who wished to attend; it was advertised in our newsletter and via our Twitter feed.

Other activities

25. In December 2012, we launched a Twitter feed to keep followers up-to-date with Committee business. We live-Tweeted from the Committee meeting at Clinterty, Aberdeen in February 2013. We also posted snippets of the recommendations set out in our Where Gypsy/Travellers live report, as well as a summary of evidence received in the Women and work inquiry. The feed enabled us to expand our stakeholder database; by the end of April 2013, we had 305 followers.

26. In February 2013, we took evidence from representatives of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) following written representations about recent changes to the EHRC’s resourcing. Following the evidence session, we received further written submissions. We then wrote to all stakeholders in April 2013 asking for their views on the evidence received to date.

27. We participated in a debate held as part of Scottish Women’s Convention’s conference, coinciding with International Women’s Day. One contributor to the debate, Carol Fox, went on to become a witness in one of the Women and Work inquiry evidence sessions.

Meetings

28. During the parliamentary year, we met 32 times. Of those meetings, 4 were wholly in private and 14 were partly in private. The majority of the items taken in private were to consider draft reports and work programme papers.

29. All meetings were held in the Scottish Parliament, with the exception of the meeting on 7 February 2013, which took place at Clinterty Travelling Person’s Site near Aberdeen.

30. During a roundtable session, we took evidence from one witness via video conference.
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