Equal Opportunities Committee

Annual Report 2014-2015
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Equal Opportunities Committee

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)

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### Committee Membership

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<th>Party</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Convener</strong></td>
<td>Margaret McCulloch</td>
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<td>Scottish Labour</td>
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<td><strong>Deputy Convener</strong></td>
<td>Sandra White</td>
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<td>Scottish National Party</td>
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<td><strong>Christian Allard</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Jayne Baxter</strong></td>
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<td><strong>John Finnie</strong></td>
<td>Independent</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Annabel Goldie</strong></td>
<td>Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party</td>
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<td><strong>John Mason</strong></td>
<td>Scottish National Party</td>
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**Note:** The membership of the Committee changed during the period covered by this report, as follows:

- Sandra White replaced Marco Biagi on 4 December 2014
- Jayne Baxter replaced Siobhan McMahon on 8 Jan 2015
- Annabel Goldie replaced Alex Johnstone on 16 March 2015
Introduction

1. This report covers the Equal Opportunities Committee’s work in the fourth year of the parliamentary session, from 11 May 2014 to 10 May 2015.

Inquiries and reports

Age and Social Isolation

2. We held two informal scoping sessions with a range of organisations in January to inform the remit of the inquiry and future evidence-taking. We were keen to hear about younger and older people’s experiences of social isolation and to identify best practice.

3. The call for evidence was launched on 19 January 2015 and we received in excess of 100 responses from a range of organisations and individuals. We took oral evidence from March until May, and heard from voluntary sector organisations, local authorities, health and housing services.

4. We agreed to meet in Easterhouse in Glasgow as part of a mini Parliament Day in order to hear evidence on the effects of social isolation in urban areas. Committee members took part in visits with local elderly people and hosted an informal lunch with a range of stakeholders before the formal meeting. Witnesses included representatives from local community groups.

5. We also agreed to hold a formal meeting on Islay to examine issues of social isolation and its impacts in a remote, rural area. Members met informally with older and younger people and hosted a ceilidh on the island in advance of the formal meeting.

6. It is hoped that evidence taking will conclude in June and we hope to publish our report by September 2015.

Fathers and parenting

7. We concluded our inquiry into Fathers and Parenting and published our report on 18 May 2014, and a response was received from the Scottish Government on 24 September 2014.

Gypsy/Travellers and care and Where Gypsy/Travellers live

8. On 19 June, we considered the Scottish Government’s response to our Gypsy/Travellers and Care, and Where Gypsy/Travellers Live reports. The Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government and COSLA to follow up on issues identified.
9. Following Ministerial evidence on 19 February, we agreed to write to the Scottish Government to provide us with further information on self-directed support, and on its working groups. An update was received on 17 March. The Committee plans to continue its follow-up work in autumn 2015.

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

10. In September 2012, we published our report Having and Keeping a Home: steps to preventing homelessness among young people. We were keen to undertake follow-up work to hear about the impact of the report’s recommendations on young people who have experienced homelessness, local authorities and voluntary organisations.

11. We issued our call for evidence in March 2014 and took further oral evidence on 14 August 2015. To help inform questioning of the Scottish Government, the Committee then shared a summary of the evidence received with a wide range of stakeholders, asking for comments by the end of 2014. On 5 February 2015 we heard evidence from the Minister for Housing and Welfare, and agreed to write to the Scottish Government for an update. On 19 February we wrote to the Minister for Housing and Welfare and the Minister for Children and Young People. Responses were received on 31 March and 1 April.

12. We also agreed to highlight our work to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment, Education and Culture and Local Government and Regeneration Committees. We plan to include recommendations for future follow-up work in the Session 4 Equal Opportunities Committee legacy report.

**Removing barriers: Race, ethnicity and employment**

13. We consulted with stakeholder groups to inform the focus of a race-related inquiry. We considered our approach to an inquiry at our meeting on 19 February 2015 and agreed to focus on race and ethnicity in relation to employment and access to the workplace.

14. The call for evidence was launched on 6 May 2015 and we plan to begin taking oral evidence in June.

**Female Genital Mutilation**

15. We took oral evidence in June 2014 from healthcare and education providers, social work services and the police. In July the Scottish Government provided an update on its national strategy to tackle violence against women, including work on female genital mutilation (FGM).

16. We tracked the work being taken forward by the Scottish Government Short Life Working Group on FGM. This will inform the Committee’s work programme to the end of the session. Members of the Committee also spoke in the Scottish
Government’s chamber debate, Working in Partnership to End the Practice of Female Genital Mutilation, on 5 February 2015\textsuperscript{16}.

**Glasgow 2014**

17. At our meeting on 19 June 2014\textsuperscript{17}, Siobhan McMahon provided feedback from a meeting held on 3 June attended by herself and the Convener, Margaret McCulloch, with David Grevemberg, the Chief Executive of Glasgow 2014 on disabled access to the Commonwealth Games.

**Subordinate Legislation**

18. During the parliamentary year, we considered 8 Scottish Statutory Instruments (SSIs): 3 under affirmative procedure and the remaining 5 under negative procedure.

**Petitions**

19. In 2014-15 the Committee considered one petition.

20. Petition PE1372: by Friends of the Earth Scotland, in relation to access to justice on environmental matters. We wrote to the Scottish Government in July 2014 for explanation of their compliance with the Aarhus convention\textsuperscript{18}, and received a response on 24 September 2014\textsuperscript{19}.

21. Following further consideration of petition PE1372 on 23 April 2015, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government for information in relation to judicial review costs and for an update on the consideration of an environmental tribunal\textsuperscript{20}. The Committee also agreed to write to the Scottish Legal Aid Board\textsuperscript{21}.

**Budget scrutiny and process 2014-15**

22. In our scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2015-16, we agreed to focus on age and in particular, the spending associated with key life ‘transitions’ for young and older people. We appointed Mr Barrie Levine as Adviser to the Committee.

23. We heard evidence from stakeholders and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth and Cabinet Secretary for the Commonwealth Games, Sport Equalities and Pensioners’ Rights in November 2014.

24. We submitted our report to the Finance Committee on 12 January\textsuperscript{22}. We also used evidence heard to inform our Age and Social Isolation inquiry.
Equalities

25. Each meeting opened with introductions from members and witnesses, and 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.

26. Early consultation was built into each piece of work undertaken by the Committee so that we could fully consider equality issues and engage with stakeholders. We also mainstreamed equality issues in the work undertaken. For example, the Committee considered issues of gender, race, disability and sexual orientation when examining age and social isolation for people across Scotland.

Other activities

27. We continued to keep our followers up-to-date with Committee business via Twitter\textsuperscript{23}. We live-tweeted from Easterhouse in Glasgow during an external committee meeting on 16 March 2015, and highlighted recommendations set out in our Fathers and Parenting report. At the beginning of 2015, we recapped our activity during 2014. Twitter enabled us to expand our stakeholder database; by the end of April 2015, we had over 900 followers.

Meetings

28. During the parliamentary year, we met 20 times. Of those meetings, 1 was wholly in private and 11 were partly in private\textsuperscript{24}. The majority of the items taken in private were to consider draft reports and work programme papers.

29. On 16 March 2015, the Committee held an external meeting as part of a mini Parliament Day in Easterhouse.
4 Correspondence from the Equal Opportunities Committee to the Scottish Government on self-directed support. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Inquiries/15-02-19_to_SG_on_GypsyTravellers.pdf [Accessed 14 May 2015].
5 Correspondence from Scottish Government on Gypsy/Traveller inquiries. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Inquiries/17-03-15_SG_re_gypsy_traveler_working_groups.pdf [Accessed 14 May 2015].
9 Correspondence from the Equal Opportunities Committee to the Scottish Government on *Having and keeping a home*. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Inquiries/General%20Documents/15-02-19_to_SG_on_Homlessness_re_housing_issues.pdf [Accessed 15 May 2015].
10 Correspondence from the Equal Opportunities Committee to the Scottish Government on GIRFEC. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/General%20Documents/15-02-19_to_SG_on_Homelessness_re_GIRFEC.pdf [Accessed 15 May 2015].
11 Correspondence from Scottish Government on *Having and keeping a home*. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/General%20Documents/Letter_from_Margaret_Burgess_MSP_Minister_for_Housing_and_Welfare_-_Letter_to_Margaret_McCulloch_MSP.pdf [Accessed 15 May 2015].
12 Correspondence from Scottish Government on GIRFEC. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/General%20Documents/s2d5E1C1A7B032F5A7C250C61BD0922E3F2_1.pdf [Accessed 13 May 2015].
15 Correspondence from Scottish Government on Equally Safe national strategy. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/General%20Documents/20140728_to_SG_re_PE1372.pdf [Accessed 13 May 2015].
18 Correspondence from Equal Opportunities Committee to Scottish Government on the Aarhus Convention. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/General%20Documents/20140728_to_SG_re_PE1372.pdf [Accessed 13 May 2015].
20 Correspondence from Equal Opportunities Committee to Scottish Government on environmental tribunals. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/General%20Documents/2015-04-30_to_SG_on_PE1372.pdf [Accessed 14 May 2015].
21 Correspondence from Equal Opportunities Committee to Scottish Legal Aid Board on legal aid. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/General%20Documents/2015-04-30_to_Legal_Aid_BOARD_on_PE1372.pdf [Accessed 14 May 2015].
23 Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee Twitter feed. Available at: https://twitter.com/SP_EqualOpps
24 Items taken in private related to consideration of the Committee’s approach to both its work programme and specific items of business, which were likely to include details of potential witnesses. Items concerning consideration of draft reports were also taken in private.