

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 25 April 2000
(Morning)

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

10th Meeting 2000, Session 1

CONVENER

*Kate MacLean (Dundee West) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

*Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

*Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)

*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)

*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

*attended

WITNESSES

Fiona Forsyth (Engender)

Irene Graham (Engender)

CLERK TEAM LEADER

Martin Verity

ASSISTANT CLERK

Alison Taylor

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 25 April 2000

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:05*]

The Convener (Kate MacLean): I welcome you all back after the recess. We have apologies from Tommy Sheridan, and Marilyn Livingstone has said that she will be late.

I propose that the second agenda item be taken in private. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

10:06

Meeting continued in private.

10:11

Meeting resumed in public.

The Convener: We have signers present; they are here primarily for agenda item 5 but will be here for the whole public part of the meeting. We will continue when the witnesses arrive.

Engender

The Convener: I welcome Fiona Forsyth and Irene Graham, who will give evidence to the committee on the budget process, which will be helpful for our consideration of the process under agenda item 4. Fiona, will you start?

Fiona Forsyth (Engender): Thank you for the invitation to give evidence on gender issues and the budget. I am speaking on behalf of Engender and the Scottish women's budget group, which we are in the process of setting up. Engender is an information, research and networking organisation for women in Scotland.

We are best known for our annual publication of the gender audit, which documents and comments on the position of women in Scotland. We have been publishing the audit since 1993. In the introduction to the most recent copy, "Gender Audit 2000", Wendy Alexander said:

"Since 1993 the annual Gender Audit has helped to persuade commentators and policy makers that women in Scotland in general still suffer disadvantage and inequalities compared to men in general, in contrast to the common perception that women had already achieved a substantial degree of equality with men."

Engender's other main activity is the

engendering change project, which provides capacity building for women's organisations to empower them to represent issues affecting women more effectively.

Building on the gender audit and engendering change, we are setting up a women's budget group which, like the gender audit, will draw on the experience of a number of individuals and organisations to comment on the impact of Government spending plans and policies. Activities to date include a submission to the consultation on Government spending plans in "Spending Plans for Scotland", organising two seminars on gender proofing of budgets—one with the Westminster women's budget group and one with the Canadian high commission—and a recent meeting with Jack McConnell.

Our work compliments the work of the Westminster women's budget group, which is mainly concerned with the impact of tax and benefits policies. It has been consulted regularly by HM Treasury on the introduction of new policies, such as the working families tax credit. We are agreed that there could be a useful link between a gender impact analysis process in the Scottish Parliament, which would focus on Scottish Executive department spending plans, and the Westminster group's focus on tax and benefits policies that affect women and men in Scotland as well.

The methodology for gender impact analysis, including that relating to spending plans, has already been developed and applied by women's organisations and Governments in South Africa, Canada, various other Commonwealth countries and Sweden, and there are opportunities to apply those lessons at the beginning of the process in Scotland. That is the case that we are making.

The aim of gender impact analysis is to examine the effectiveness of policies. By focusing on the results, we can ask whether money has been invested well. The easiest way to illustrate that is to take an example, such as women in poverty. Women are much more likely to find themselves in poverty than are men and much more likely to remain in poverty for a longer time. Poverty is a burden for all who experience it; we must stress that we are not promoting the well-being of one group at the expense of another that is also facing discrimination and poverty.

The purpose of the gender analysis of poverty would be to establish whether answers to questions about the likelihood of falling into poverty, the duration of poverty, the consequences of poverty, and policies that are designed to combat poverty, are the same for men as they are for women. Indeed, it would establish whether there are different answers for distinct groups of men and women. For example, black and ethnic

minority women's needs are often overlooked and misunderstood because assumptions are made about their needs.

We welcome the budgetary consultation process that has been started by the Scottish Executive and the move away from old departments towards issue-based departments. The next step would be to get financial assistance to catch up with cross-cutting political priorities, especially equality and social inclusion. Gender impact analysis would be an effective way of achieving that.

We have not had much time to look at the report, "Investing in You", but I want to make a few brief points to illustrate the kinds of issues that might arise if a detailed gender impact analysis were carried out. I want to look briefly at four areas: children and education; communities; enterprise and lifelong learning; and transport. On children and education, we welcome the increased resources for child care and pre-school education, but we are concerned about the cost of the child-care strategy in terms of low wages for child-care workers, the overwhelming majority of whom are women.

On communities, we have a number of issues. We welcome the increase in resources for social inclusion, but we are concerned that the voluntary sector, which provides many essential services to women and children, remains relatively poorly resourced and, according to "Investing in You" is due to have its allocation reduced in 2001-02. As we know, the reality is that many voluntary organisations that provide targeted services for women are facing insecure funding and increased competition among themselves for resources. We are concerned that the social inclusion partnership monitoring guidelines issued by the Scottish Executive contain virtually no references to gender. Safeguards are needed to ensure that social inclusion partnerships take account of the needs of the whole community if they are to be effective in tackling the causes of social exclusion.

On enterprise and lifelong learning, we recommend that targets for further and higher education include the development of part-time programmes and the provision of child care to ensure wider access, particularly for women with caring responsibilities. We are concerned by the low proportion of women in business in Scotland and the gender stereotyping of Government-funded training. We recommend monitoring the gender pay gap, in other words women's full-time earnings as a percentage of men's, mainstreaming all Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise programmes and allocating funding for positive action initiatives that address gender segregation in enterprise training in the labour market. Policies and programmes need to address the needs of part-time and low-paid workers and

their carers.

On transport, the Scottish Executive recently commissioned research and consultation on issues affecting women's use of various forms of transport. It found that women have much less access to cars and are more frequent users of public transport. Looking at "Investing in You", we are concerned that the proposed reduction in allocation to Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive in 2001-02 will adversely impact on women.

In conclusion, we would like to say that gender impact assessment is a useful way of assessing the effectiveness of policies and that there is an opportunity for the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament to introduce those processes at the beginning, based on methods that have been developed in countries such as South Africa. In particular, we strongly urge the Scottish Parliament and the Executive to take over the work of the gender audit. We will not be able to produce the gender audit in future due to a lack of resources—we have been doing this in a voluntary capacity for seven years—but it is the sort of audit that is a necessary first step for a gender impact assessment.

In the meeting with Jack McConnell, we suggested that the Scottish Executive second an adviser to work with finance department officers on adapting a gender impact analysis toolkit, which has been developed in Canada, for use in Scotland, because we recognise that the necessary expertise is not available at the moment. While we collectively can offer a lot of experience and expertise from the women's budget group and Engender, we are constrained by our lack of resources. We are already finding it difficult to meet the number of requests that we have had, although we welcome the fact that people are beginning to look at these issues in more detail.

The Convener: Thank you Fiona. Irene Graham, do you wish to add anything at this stage?

Irene Graham (Engender): No.

The Convener: Fiona, could you explain the gender analysis toolkit?

Fiona Forsyth: We recently had a seminar with the Canadian high commission at which we learned a lot about how Canada, which has 25 years' experience of this issue, has approached gender analysis. A lot of work has also been done by the Commonwealth gender budget initiative. Some processes have been developed and there is a fair amount of agreement on how gender analysis should be done, but the starting point is good gender-disaggregated data. From that, an analysis can be done on what policies are trying to

achieve.

The data must be available in order to monitor whether policies are meeting targets. The example of transport is good, because the Scottish Executive research is thorough and produces a lot of information about the different forms of male and female use of transport, including public transport. With that starting point, it would be possible to look at whether public transport policies are meeting the needs of all. When I refer to women, obviously different groups of women have different needs. The research has looked at that in a lot of detail. The starting point must be good gender disaggregated data.

The Convener: I open this discussion to questions from committee members.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I was interested to hear what you said about social inclusion partnerships. Can you expand on that? I have experience of my local social inclusion partnership. SIPs for geographical areas are based on the idea that local communities determine priorities. How do you develop a gender perspective when you have tried to devolve decision making down to that level? Has any work been done to look at whether the SIP agenda has properly addressed the needs of women?

Irene Graham: On the last point, research has been commissioned to look at the impact of social inclusion partnerships on women in four areas. That research is currently with the Scottish Executive and is not yet published, but early indications show that in some areas the result of SIPs has been that money has been taken away from what you might call women's projects and projects that were set up to serve women. You will have the details of the research at some point during this Parliament.

The second question is how you develop a gender perspective. Fiona's presentation mentioned monitoring and analysis tools. One way to ensure that resources are going to women is for monitoring analysis to look at that. The danger with SIPs is that if everything is devolved to a local level and it is not within a policy context and a strongly driven policy framework, you will get very localised solutions. It is about getting a balance and giving more guidance and direction to SIPs to say that they should be meeting certain key priorities. If one of those key priorities concerned gender and gender disaggregated data on the impacts of decisions, you might get some results.

10:30

Johann Lamont: Is part of the problem that we currently think of social inclusion partnership decisions and budgeting decisions as being gender neutral? How do we win the political

argument that if we do not intervene it is not neutral but operates against women? Given the role of women as carers and people who are managing budgets in excluded communities they are a key part of the social inclusion agenda, yet that is not acknowledged. How will we win the political argument that we do not currently have gender-neutral budgets?

Irene Graham: There is not an easy answer to that. In her introduction to "Gender Audit 2000" Wendy Alexander says that a common assumption is that women have reached equality so there is no longer any need to target women specifically. That is a myth. We have only to examine who is disadvantaged and where discrimination lies to find that women are high up in those league tables. It is difficult to put the arguments on that issue, as it is not popular.

Women's organisations are concerned, as there is an assumption that, for example, as the domestic abuse development fund has been set up, we have taken care of women's issues. How can we change that? If something as important as the Scottish Parliament or the Scottish Executive were to make it one of its priorities, that might alter that perception.

It would be helpful if monitoring and evaluation of social inclusion partnerships included consideration of who is benefiting. The way to do that might be to focus not only on women. The telling factor in all social inclusion partnerships investment is who benefits. Those statistics could be disaggregated to show which men benefit, what ages they are, how long they have been unemployed, how long women have been unemployed, what is their social responsibility and where black and ethnic minority communities fit in. If the statistics were disaggregated along all of those lines, we would see clearly who is benefiting. That would be the way to evaluate social inclusion partnerships without creating antagonism.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): You make a number of recommendations in your report, which you have repeated in your evidence today. For example, you recommend that Scottish spending plans incorporate a gender impact assessment and that there be a mechanism to assess their impact on women better. You said that you have met the Minister for Finance to discuss those issues and you recommended that there be an adviser to take them forward. How were those recommendations received? How amenable was he to your suggestions?

Fiona Forsyth: Our meeting with the minister was only two weeks ago, so the Scottish Executive is still discussing our recommendations. It was acknowledged that there is a lack of expertise in the finance department: while it

accepts that considering cross-cutting issues such as equality and social inclusion is a good idea, it recognises that in practice it will be difficult for it to do so. There appeared to be some willingness to consider those issues, but the report "Investing in You", which has just been published, has no gender impact analysis at all, which is disappointing. We have recommended that someone should be seconded to work especially with finance department officials to improve understanding in the department by adapting methodology that has already been developed elsewhere, for example in Canada and South Africa.

The Treasury is in discussion with the women's budget group in London, so there is a precedent. There is a willingness on the department's part to consider those issues, but Engender is disappointed that "Investing in You" is gender blind.

Irene McGugan: Is finding the correct and most effective mechanisms to take this forward the main issue?

Fiona Forsyth: We want to ensure that the process is better for next year. We are talking about developing a framework and embedding processes so that in the future we should not have the problem of gender-blind policies that cannot analyse the current or future situation.

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): You have mentioned the different tools that can be used to make a gender impact assessment and the Canadian model. Engender must have come to a conclusion as to what it thinks would be the best way forward for the gender impact assessment that would fit best with the Scottish Parliament model. Will you say more about that?

You have both used the terms Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament as interchangeable. Are you talking about a mechanism that the Scottish Executive will use or are you talking about the Scottish Parliament using a similar mechanism in addition to that, or adopting a different model? The Executive and Parliament have distinct roles. Where do you think the Equal Opportunities Committee fits into the process, as it seems to have an obvious role?

Fiona Forsyth: In relation to the gender impact assessment mechanisms that the Scottish Executive should use, a fairly technical methodology has been developed, which is why we want an adviser to work closely with finance department officials.

You are right to point out that the Scottish Parliament would have a different process. The Equal Opportunities Committee has an overview, so its role would be to ask the right questions of the other committees and to help members of

other committees to ask the right questions. It might not have to get so involved in the various processes that the Scottish Executive officials would have to be involved in but it must ask the right questions to bring clarity.

The point to bear in mind is the end purpose of the policy that is being discussed and who it benefits. The question to keep asking is—is it benefiting all the people it sets out to benefit? When you ask those questions, you often rapidly come to the conclusion that you do not have the information to answer them, so it may be necessary to direct research to consider specific issues in detail. The Parliament and the Equal Opportunities Committee must ensure that those questions are asked repeatedly.

Engender is concerned about the lack of overlap between the Equal Opportunities Committee and the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee. I believe that there is no overlap. We are concerned about that as they are the two committees that most directly impact on social inclusion and poverty and, as Irene Graham said, women are more likely to experience poverty. We would like the Equal Opportunities Committee to ask questions and assist members of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee to ask questions about the gender impact of policies.

Irene Graham: Shona Robison asked about what we might see as the difference between the role of the Scottish Executive and that of the Scottish Parliament. What came clearly out of the seminar with the Canadian high commission was that over 25 years Canada has developed fairly elaborate and continually developing systems to disaggregate the statistics and consider who is benefiting from budgets and in which way. This is the start of a new political system and a new system, through the Scottish Executive, to deliver the policies. We are saying that, at this early stage, it must build in gender disaggregation through the bureaucratic system. Economists, the finance department and other departments should consider building in a gender analysis to the process in whichever way is appropriate.

What came out clearly at the seminar was that different Government departments in Canada operate in different ways. Some departments have specifically allocated people to monitor, record and develop their gender analysis while others have taken a mainstreaming approach.

In relation to the Scottish Parliament, I will go back to the question asked by Johann Lamont. It is about taking the political lead, through whichever mechanism is possible. A scrutinising committee might well be the way to do that. If a committee such as this one were to ask for a gender analysis from every department, that would

begin to kick in to the other structures. You must decide which approach is appropriate, but we would welcome the Scottish Parliament giving a political lead.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): You spoke about your disappointment that "Investing in You" does not include a gender impact assessment. You recommend that an adviser be attached to the finance department. I am curious about the role of the Scottish Executive equality unit that was set up last November. I would have expected it to have had an input to those processes. I would certainly have expected it to have had input into "Investing in You". From your discussion with Jack McConnell, do you know whether any of this was run past the equality unit?

Fiona Forsyth: The equality unit is a small part of the Scottish Executive and it is not very well resourced. As Irene Graham said, we would ideally want all the departments in the Scottish Executive to consider the gender impact assessment of their work.

The finance department is responsible for taking a lead on the consultation about the spending plans, which is why we suggested that it should be the starting point for considering gender impact assessment. We suggested seconding an adviser to work with appropriate officials, which would include working with somebody from the equality unit. The responsibility for, and the need for technical expertise in designing, the budget and the spending plans lies with the finance department, which is why we suggest that the adviser should be seconded to it.

If the equality unit copies the Canadian model, it will try to improve understanding of equality throughout the Scottish Executive. I understand that that is what the unit is considering, but that would include a range of issues such as spending plans and other matters.

Tricia Marwick: Is there a danger in suggesting that there should be advisers when there might already be a mechanism for doing this in the unit, which is, in your words, under resourced? Perhaps more resources should be given to the unit so that it can consider the impact of gender issues throughout the Scottish Executive.

Irene Graham: Yvonne Strachan, of the equality unit, was at the seminar. She gave an account of how the equality unit is working.

A concern from Engender's perspective is that the equality unit is in its infancy and is currently consulting on "Towards an Equality Strategy". It is still working out how it should make progress. Its emphasis is on mainstreaming. The question is how we ensure mainstreaming takes effect and is properly embedded in the processes from the

start. We are concerned that the equality unit is perhaps not best geared to do that at the moment. An adviser, with a specific remit to examine budgets and target key issues, might be the way forward; it might not be the way forward for evermore, but at this stage it would add to the early work being done in the equality unit.

10:45

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): It is as if every door we open leads to another—it is such a big process. Where do you think that we should start? Presumably, each committee should be examining its own budget, but do you think that we should be targeting one or two areas? Your presentation suggested that there are many areas that are critical but that are not often considered in the Scottish budget. A good example of that is wages. People think that good progress has been made on child care but no budget lines show what is happening to the wages of child care workers. The Scottish Executive has done much that has had an effect on women's wages, including child care training, although that impact has never really been examined.

The other thing that strikes me is that so many decisions are made at local level. How do you get into the Scottish Enterprise budget, for example? A few years ago I was involved in an organisation called Training 2000. How do you get a grip on things like that? How do you ensure that such organisations are giving priority to positive action initiatives? How do you think that we should proceed?

Fiona Forsyth: It is a huge area. However, we can draw on the experience of other countries. We are at the beginning of a process, which should help. We can draw on the expertise in Scotland gained through the gender audit, and on the work of the women's budget group in London. When we asked the Canadian experts last month, they said that a good place to begin was where there was political will. It helps to begin where there is a minister who is interested in the subject. It may be sensible to begin in areas where there is already a lot of political support, data or concern about the adverse impact of policies on a certain group.

Enterprise and lifelong learning is a large area and much of the decision making is devolved. However, as we said earlier, if there is a strong political message that this is important, parameters are set for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the targets are not gender blind, as they are at the moment, that will begin to make a difference. The enterprise network may be a very good starting point, because it has a large budget.

There is a lot of evidence to show that enterprise policies have not taken into account the fact that

women's business start-up patterns are different from those of men. Enterprise programmes that target businesses with high growth potential and a turnover of about £100,000 per year in the first two years exclude women, because most women's businesses operate below that level. A positive action measure, such as the microcredit programme that was given £1 million on International Women's Day, is a starting point. However, that does not answer the mainstreaming question. We need to set parameters and for the committee and the minister to send out a strong message about the importance of gender awareness in policy and budgets.

Irene Graham: Scottish Enterprise could consider what is happening in Europe. The Equal Opportunities Commission has developed a toolkit for mainstreaming equality, which was launched by Jack McConnell two months ago. Increasingly, European social fund money is demanding that all the various partners and players demonstrate where resources are going to women. Many of the projects that are supported by SIPs have matched funding from Europe. If we were to follow that through, so that the projects had to demonstrate how women are impacted by the various training projects, business development projects and so on, we would be able to see results.

We must start by looking for the opportunities. Political will can often be created when there are resources to back it up—in the case of enterprise, there would be.

Malcolm Chisholm: A review of the local enterprise companies is currently under way and I do not know whether that has taken gender on board. That is one of the problems for the Equal Opportunities Committee. We have to keep our eye on every other committee.

In the Health and Community Care Committee, we have found that the biggest block of money goes to the health boards and that makes it difficult to track the budget. There is a tension between local and central; the centre must provide some strategic direction.

As you will know, Glasgow puts money into women's health projects, but that is very unusual and does not happen elsewhere in Scotland. How do we drive such things forward when we do not have control of budgets at a local level? Similarly, local authorities make most of the decisions relating to voluntary organisations.

Irene Graham: Local authorities take some, but not all, of the decisions about the voluntary sector. The lottery plays an increasingly significant role in funding the voluntary sector, as do voluntary contributions from various fundraising activities. A recent report from Glasgow shows that 100 projects have closed in the past four years. We

must begin to ask everyone to carry out gender disaggregation. We must also look for particular political sympathy and commitment. If we could demonstrate the results that would accrue from that exercise—the way in which people would benefit—and begin to disaggregate everything on a gender basis, coupled with targets, the way forward would become clear.

The Canadian discussions told us that, after 25 years, they still have not got it right. We are not going to achieve anything overnight, but we need to start the process. We must start by asking the question and then focus on one or two areas to show how targeting money towards women gives results that benefit women and others. The evidence shows that if one targets women to bring them out of poverty, it has a spiral effect on families.

Malcolm Chisholm: The examples of what is happening in other countries are very helpful. I know that you have visited South Africa, Irene, to find out about the fairly radical things that they are doing there. Will you say something about that?

Irene Graham: What was striking about South Africa was that they are gender proofing their budgets. They are examining the impact of all their budgets on women. That is happening right down to local government level. Given that local government in South Africa is much more varied than in Scotland, that shows us that it can be done here.

At the community meetings that I attended, I was told that men were the head and women were the neck: the women were supporting the social fabric. Having come from a position where they had no status in the political framework, women were guaranteed places in Parliament. Those women ensure that the limited resources available have an impact on women's lives. I cannot give specific examples, but gender mainstreaming has made a difference.

We have to take action at all sorts of different levels, from outside lobbying from the voluntary sector to politicians taking a lead when it might not be popular. There may be a populist backlash against such a lead, but that is what is needed.

Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): You have demonstrated that the issues are complex and broad and that we still have a long way to go. As you said, our Canadian colleagues have been doing it for 25 years and are still not clear about the way ahead.

You mentioned transport issues. What aspect of transport were you referring to? Public transport is quite a topical issue. Were you referring to the inconvenience of public transport, the need for increased frequency or better access and a more family-friendly cost? What issues did you want to

highlight?

Fiona Forsyth: The Scottish Parliament is not able to influence much public transport, because the remit would include airports, Caledonian MacBrayne and trunk roads. The research that has just been completed by the Scottish Executive shows a clear difference in the use of public transport by men and women. That includes whether people have access to a car, hold a driving licence and so on. It shows that women are more likely to use public transport and that they make shorter, more complicated journeys, mixing different types of transport and are often encumbered by children and shopping. Safety issues are also important to women. Those issues are compounded for rural people who use public transport.

A gender impact analysis would influence decisions about priorities for financial allocation. One could consider the impact of deciding to prioritise roads over public transport, which might mean that better-off men would benefit more than women and those groups who use public transport and who are much more likely to be socially excluded. The fact that the Scottish Parliament does not have overall responsibility for transport makes it difficult to follow that through.

In my introduction I cited the example of the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive, which is a good public service that extends throughout the west of Scotland. It is unfortunate that under the current plans set out in "Investing in You" its allocation would be reduced in the year 2001-02. A gender impact assessment would make clear that we should not do that, even if it were not possible to do anything about other forms of public transport.

11:00

I think that this research provides the committee with a good starting point, as it contains information broken down by age and region and sets out the reasons why people use different forms of transport. It shows how worries about safety prevent different age groups using certain forms of transport. It would be useful in the first instance to consider relationships with local authorities and the SPTE.

Mr Munro: I was concerned by the suggestion in your paper that less money should be directed towards new road systems and that resources should be concentrated more on improving the current infrastructure and the transport system that operates on it.

Fiona Forsyth: We are saying that a gender impact analysis would allow the Parliament to ask questions and to make decisions, knowing clearly what impact those are having on different groups

of people and how they fit in with other priorities such as social inclusion.

The Convener: I ask members to speak up and to speak right into the microphones, as the signer is having difficulty hearing what some people are saying.

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): I want to return to the question of resources. Any Government or Administration will always argue that it is investing more money. Should the focus of this committee be on trying to find more resources or on getting the policies right so that what is available is spent and targeted better? What does the experience of other countries suggest is the best way of tackling this issue?

Fiona Forsyth: A gender impact assessment will allow the Parliament to test whether policies are achieving what they are intended to achieve. It is designed to clarify the result that is aimed at—to establish whom we are trying to benefit and whether we are benefiting those people. It is not about more resources so much as testing effectiveness of policies.

The Convener: There are no further questions or comments. Thank you for giving evidence to the committee today.

Budget Process

The Convener: All members should have received a short paper. We do not yet know on which date the Deputy Minister for Communities and the Minister for Finance will appear before the committee. Members will be aware that the convener of the Finance Committee has written to all subject committees to ask them to consider what impact expenditure proposals in their areas will have on men and women.

I have also sent all subject committees a letter in which I asked them both to follow the guidance of the Finance Committee and to take account of the different effects of the Executive's spending plans on disabled people, ethnic minorities and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. The letter asks conveners to respond to the Equal Opportunities Committee by outlining the steps that their committees intend to take or have taken to address those issues.

One response to my letter has been received but, because it went out just before recess, I assume that most of the committees will not yet have considered it. I will copy all responses to committee members so we can discuss them at our next meeting.

On the suggestion, point 9 in the paper, of a consultation exercise, perhaps we should contact relevant groups, asking them to send comments to the appropriate service committees but to copy those comments to us.

Tricia Marwick's question on the equality unit was pertinent. I am happy to write to it to ask what involvement in the budget process it has had or will have. There appears to be only one mention of equality in "Investing in You", on page 34, with a one-sentence objective on the following page:

"To develop the mechanisms for promoting equality of opportunity and for mainstreaming equality into policy making".

We might want to ask the Deputy Minister for Communities and the Minister for Finance to expand on that.

Are there any other comments? Are members happy with my suggestions so far?

Point 8 suggests that we might appoint a reporter on the budget issue. Unless anyone else is keen to take on that role, I am happy to deal with the budget issue on behalf of the committee. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Tricia Marwick: Listening to the discussion today has made me quite uncomfortable about the range of subjects that will be discussed by other

committees. How will this committee get a handle on what other committees will be discussing? Short of reading all their discussions, it is likely to be very difficult to make the kind of input we would like to make. I would like us to discuss as a committee, perhaps in private, how we hope to influence the processes so that we do not find ourselves in a situation where the decisions have been taken before we have even made an input.

The Convener: That would be a good idea. The budget process shows how difficult it is for this committee to keep a handle on things. If we are committed to mainstreaming equality, as is the Executive and all the other committees, each committee should take responsibility for equality and we should oversee that, until things reach the stage when it becomes automatic for the other committees to think about equality. We should discuss how to do that.

Johann Lamont: We suggested that other committees should be given the kind of presentation we had today outlining the politics behind equality provisions and the processes people might be expected to follow. The Local Government Committee intends to have a briefing on equality and services to women in relation to local government finance. It is to be hoped that each committee understands that need.

As has been said, if mainstreaming works, the other committees are going to be taking that on and this committee can generate interest or point people in the right direction. It will be interesting to see to what extent the committees respond to our letter and to the Finance Committee. Our job, perhaps, is to monitor to what extent the committees pursue equality in the budget process, as opposed to pursuing it on their behalf. I am encouraged by the Local Government Committee's response—it was quite keen.

The Convener: That committee has responded to my letter. We should encourage equality organisations to contact service committees directly. We have been taking all the evidence on equality issues and collating it for the service committees. It would be useful if they were to hear evidence as well as us.

Johann Lamont: To pick up on a point made by Fiona Forsyth, it would be useful to consider our relationship with the Social Inclusion, Housing and the Voluntary Sector Committee. We should let that committee know that there are many issues on which we would want to work together.

The Convener: I would be happy to discuss that with that committee's convener.

Petition

The Convener: The next item is petition PE139 from the Platform Adult Learning Centre, calling for the Scottish Parliament to provide translation services in the Parliament for deaf people, deaf-blind people and for people with hearing difficulties.

I think that the Parliament has provided such a service only twice: once in the chamber and once in this committee. I believe that the request is valid. All we can do is write to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body and ask it to consider the matter and respond to the committee.

Shona Robison: It might be worth trying to find out other practice, perhaps in European Parliaments. I think that we should be providing such a service and that information would back up the case.

The Convener: I can get the Scottish Parliament information centre to find out what happens in other Parliaments. We would have to contact the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body in the end, though.

I think that it is simply tokenistic to have translation available only at certain meetings when certain matters are being discussed. It means that someone who is hard of hearing cannot drop in on a meeting in the way that others can. We should be able to find out the information that Shona Robison mentioned and get a letter off to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body fairly soon. I will report back to the committee at a future meeting.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I am concerned about the availability of skilled interpreters to do the work. It might be unfair of the Parliament to draw on a limited pool of available people. We should perhaps train our own interpreters. Could we pass that suggestion on?

The Convener: I believe that that was discussed when Parliament debated Winnie Ewing's members' business motion. It was pointed out that there is a lack of trained signers, courses and funding for those courses. I will find out what was agreed and what the minister's response was.

Nora Radcliffe: One of the fundamental difficulties in this area is the smallness of the pool that can be drawn on.

Tricia Marwick: It is sufficient for this committee to say that the service should be provided. It is up to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to decide how to do that. This committee should send a clear message that the service is desirable.

The Convener: It is also worth considering and

consulting about the types of service that would be required. For deaf-blind people, for example, signing is no use. I will get moving on that and report to the committee when I get a response. Are we agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Mainstreaming

The Convener: The next item deals with mainstreaming. I understand that the Procedures Committee is currently reviewing how the committees are working. Martin Verity can expand on that.

11:15

Martin Verity (Clerk Team Leader): I understand that the Procedures Committee is considering a proposal at its meeting this morning that it should conduct a review of the performance of the Parliament in meeting the key objectives that were set out in the consultative steering group's report. However, the committee is not proposing to tackle equal opportunities issues directly in that review, because that would fall within the remit of this committee. We do not yet know the outcome of this morning's discussion.

Shona Robison: You say that the Procedures Committee is examining the performance of each committee in its area.

Martin Verity: No, I understand that it will examine the performance of the whole Parliament measured against the key principles of the Parliament, such as accessibility and accountability. I cannot say what the Procedures Committee will decide, but I understand that it will not focus on equal opportunities issues, because those fall within the remit of this committee.

Shona Robison: I am not convinced that I am happy with that. Is that not pigeon-holing equal opportunities rather than examining the performance of the Parliament on equal opportunities and mainstreaming? Passing the issue back to the Equal Opportunities Committee does not fit with what we have been trying to do as regards mainstreaming. It is too easy to say that the Equal Opportunities Committee should deal with it. I would have real concerns about that.

The Convener: I, too, have concerns, which is why I raised this issue under mainstreaming. I did not find out until this morning that the Procedures Committee was discussing it.

Malcolm Chisholm: I agree with Shona Robison. We have already discussed mainstreaming in the context of the budget. In those discussions, it became clear that we have a massive task. However, we have made a reasonable start.

I want to raise the issue of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, on which we have done a considerable amount of work. We did a report on the bill, but it is unfinished business. We need to ensure that our report is taken forward at

stage 2. I understand that one of the amendments proposed by the Equal Opportunities Committee was defeated at the first meeting at which the Education, Culture and Sport Committee considered the bill, but there must be opportunities to lodge further amendments. I am concerned that we should engage with that process. What happened at the first meeting was not encouraging, because the amendment was defeated on the advice of the Executive. I am not sure what its reasoning was, but we will have opportunities to lodge further amendments. I am referring in particular to the general amendment that we discussed when preparing our report, which would probably involve adding a new section, which would be debated at the end of stage 2.

Ideally, committees should be considering mainstreaming for themselves, but we must keep an eye on what they are up to. It is part of our job to take mainstreaming amendments to committees. We should consider that in the near future, in the context of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill.

The Convener: We did that successfully when the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill was being scrutinised by the Justice and Home Affairs Committee. There is still time to lodge committee amendments to the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, either at stage 2 or stage 3. Malcolm, do you want to find out what stage we are at and return to the committee with suggestions?

Malcolm Chisholm: Yes, I will do that.

The Convener: I think that the bill is still at stage 2. If there is not time, perhaps we could e-mail amendments on which this committee has already agreed. Is everybody happy with that?

Shona Robison: We should also ask the Education, Culture and Sport Committee why it would not support our amendment. It would be useful to find out its reasoning.

Malcolm Chisholm: The amendment that was not agreed was to section 1. It should still be possible to lodge other amendments. The *Official Report* makes it clear that that committee felt that the amendment was unnecessary. We could, no doubt, provide counter arguments.

Johann Lamont: I want to return to the issue concerning the Procedures Committee. I am bamboozled by the fact that a committee that is responsible for the procedures, systems and processes of the Parliament should consider how effective everything is without considering equality of opportunity. The extent to which procedures discriminate against particular groups, the extent to which our Parliament is family friendly and the extent to which it is accessible to outside groups

are considerations that should be at the heart of that committee's remit.

I cannot understand why it wants to ignore the politics of the procedures to concentrate on such issues as how long members should be allowed to speak. That issue could be addressed in five minutes, with conclusions written on the back of an envelope. There are issues concerning the extent to which back benchers are excluded from debates, but that is a relatively simple matter. We should ask the Procedures Committee to examine the harder issues surrounding procedures, which concern equality of opportunity. Perhaps the convener could approach that committee, or this committee could write to it in puzzled tones, saying that we cannot believe what it is doing.

The Convener: I heard just this morning that that is what that committee is discussing. If the committee leaves the matter to me, I shall write to the convener of the Procedures Committee to express the concern of this committee that it is not discussing equal opportunities. I shall find out exactly what is happening, as I am concerned about the situation.

Nora Radcliffe: Should we express our concern or our disbelief?

The Convener: That depends on what the Procedures Committee has been discussing. I shall be as diplomatic as usual. Does anybody have anything more to say on mainstreaming?

Shona Robison: In the last paragraph of the committee paper, Martin Verity alludes to the way in which we respond to consultation papers from the Executive. We must address that, not only in regard to the format in which we are expected to respond, but in regard to timetables. The situation has been far from ideal. I do not know whether we should engage in that discussion now, but we must address the issue.

The Convener: It could be included in the discussion that Tricia Marwick suggested. Sometimes this committee takes on too much: we should oversee the work of other committees rather than carry out all the work ourselves. We could leave that issue to a future discussion. Today, we should find out what is happening in the Procedures Committee, as it is important to establish how that committee views equal opportunities and the work of other committees. We can include the issue that Shona Robison suggests as an item on a future agenda.

Public Appointments

The Convener: Item 7 is about appointments to public bodies in Scotland. Members have a copy of the consultation paper. Does anybody have any comments on it? I was quite happy with many of the suggestions in the consultation paper.

Mr McMahon: It is a question for Irene McGugan. At the disability reporters group, we discussed the fact that although there is a reference to widening the scope of appointments in relation to gender and ethnicity, there is a glaring omission in relation to disability. I do not know whether Irene has any more information, but the whole committee must be aware of that omission.

Irene McGugan: That is noted in the minutes, which will come up under the next agenda item. During the debate, the minister was asked whether he would want to amend that situation and set targets. He assured Parliament that disabled membership would be monitored, even if no specific targets were to be met. A commitment was also given to encourage disabled candidates to apply for appointments, but no target was set. The reason given was that disability takes many forms and it would therefore be almost impossible to set meaningful targets.

I wanted to ask the committee whether it feels that that is a reasonable reason for not setting targets. Is it enough to have a commitment to encourage disabled candidates and for Parliament to monitor the situation or do we want to push for a workable definition so that we can set targets for disabled people?

The Convener: I do not know how the Executive can say it is difficult without doing it. If targets were set, it could at least come back in a year or two and demonstrate that it had been difficult to achieve them because it is difficult to define the criteria or whatever. I would have thought that the committee would want to recommend that targets be set for disabled people as well.

Shona Robison: It seems a bit strange not to set targets. Meaningful targets have been set for people with disabilities in a number of arenas, whether in the employment market or in the voluntary sector. There is practice out there, which shows that it can be done. The Executive is presumably aware of that. I agree that we should put pressure on for targets to be set.

Malcolm Chisholm: It is well known—although this point has not been dealt with in the document—that targets cover all public appointments, despite the fact that, as we all know, there are different kinds of appointment. It

does not downgrade children's panels to say that the figures for them completely distort the targets. The lead target is to increase the proportion of women appointees from the 1998 level of 47 per cent to 50 per cent by 2002. However, that target is skewed because of the massive number of appointments to children's panels. We need to have separate targets for executive appointments to non-departmental public bodies—the key decision-making bodies—rather than an overall target that masks the fact that, for example, only 25 per cent of people in the top decision-making appointments are women.

The Convener: When the matter was first discussed in Parliament, I raised the point that 2,000 or so of the 3,800 public appointments are to children's panels. I am almost certain that the minister gave an assurance that children's panel membership would not be included in the targets, but I will clarify that.

Malcolm Chisholm: That is certainly not built into this document.

Mr McMahon: Given the scope of the paper and the fact that it is a consultation paper, would it be worth having the minister along so that we can explore those types of issue here rather than through correspondence?

The Convener: The deadline for the consultation is Friday, so we have to make our comments now. When the minister comes, there will be no difficulty questioning him on his plans for meeting the targets, but we need to decide today on our response to the consultation.

We have agreed that we want to ensure that children's panel appointments are not included in the targets for gender equality, because they skew the figures, and that public appointment targets are set for disabled people.

The role of the committee will be to monitor the effects of the consultation to ensure that there is wider representation on quangos.

11:30

Johann Lamont: One of the challenges is to ensure that all the wee practical things are done, such as deciding where advertisements are placed. Behind all that, we must challenge attitudes to defining good quality. One could set up all sorts of accessible processes, but if people have a fixed picture in their heads of what they consider to be talent or ability there will be no diversity. If people want to see no more than a mainstream CV, there will still be a problem. We must break down that obstacle.

I welcome the consultation. Having reached this stage, it would be worth having a dialogue with the minister. Once the consultation exercise has

finished, we can reflect on whether we need to reinforce some points. We may take the opportunity to discuss budget issues with him at the same time.

Nora Radcliffe: One aspect that has not been given enough attention is the barriers to people putting themselves forward. For example, some appointments can be taken up only by people who can afford to do unpaid work. People with young children often cannot afford child care. We should be examining how to eliminate such barriers.

The Convener: There is nothing in the document about assisting people. If we want wider representation, we must consider training and accessibility. For example, papers would have to be provided in accessible formats and any other barriers would have to be dealt with. We could certainly ask whether reference can be made to assisting people who might have difficulties becoming involved in public life.

Johann Lamont: The barrier argument is right; there are things that prevent people putting themselves forward. However, my political experience tells me that there is an issue of equal concern about people defining what talent and ability are in such a way that, even if people overcome barriers to put themselves forward, they are not considered in the same way as other applicants. I am reluctant to see the problem as lying with the person who is not applying, rather than with the person who is putting applicants into categories of those who are worthwhile and those who are not. That applies to paid posts as well as to voluntary ones. There is little diversity in high-profile paid posts. We must strike the right balance between saying that there are reasons for people not applying and challenging the attitudes that underpin much of the exclusion that happens in the appointments system.

The Convener: Although benefits are not a devolved matter, we should ask Westminster to consider how payments can affect people's benefits. It has been pointed out to me that some paid appointments can affect people's benefits, and even a small payment can have an adverse affect on personal finances. That means that quite a big group of people are being denied access to involvement in public appointments. That is an issue that we must flag up. I shall e-mail those points to members and ask them to agree to them by Friday—perhaps with a little leeway. If anything else occurs to you, let me know. Are members happy with that?

Members indicated agreement.

Reporters

The Convener: The first report, from Irene McGugan, is on disability issues.

Irene McGugan: The group met just before the recess, on 4 April. We are still following up the evidence given by the Disabled Persons Housing Service and we will consider a draft report at our next meeting. Robert Brown has lodged a motion that encompasses many of the issues that were raised by DPHS.

It has been difficult to access the guide for MSPs to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, but we are advised that the launch and distribution of that leaflet is imminent—it should be available this week. Capability Scotland assures us that the committee will receive copies of it very soon. The reporters group recommends that the guide be given maximum publicity and the subject of a fairly high-profile briefing for all MSPs—not just members of the committee—so that all are aware of their responsibilities under part III in terms of providing services.

For those who are interested, there is on the website that is mentioned in the leaflet a summary of the 156 recommendations of the disability rights task force. The Executive is considering them; the reporters group will consider them further at our next meeting. We decided that it was appropriate to make links with the cross-party group on disability so that there was no duplication of work. That has been actioned and the two groups will exchange minutes. People who are members of both groups will act as informal co-ordinators.

A new organisation, Learning Disability Alliance Scotland, has been set up. Some of you might have attended the launch, which took place in this room the week before the recess. Its principal aim is to keep the Scottish Parliament informed of the views of learning-disabled people. It has highlighted a number of relevant issues that we have touched on in the past. One of those is transport, a subject that the reporters group will keep under review as there have been recent developments. The central research unit on disability issues has published a report and the minister has announced that a national group is being set up to advise the Executive on the transport needs of people with disabilities.

A new guidance leaflet on good practice for small business has been published. That was historic as it was the first time all three commissions have worked together to produce a document. Most of you will have copies of it.

The issue about targets for disabled people being appointed to public bodies has been addressed.

The Convener: Are there any questions for Irene? It seems not, so we will hear Johann Lamont's report.

Johann Lamont: I apologise for not providing a written report. I hope that others who were at the meetings will fill in anything that I miss out.

We have had two meetings since the last meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee. On 4 April, we concentrated on "Towards a Just Conclusion". Lesley Irving, who has been seconded to the Scottish Executive, is part of the group that is developing a response to it. We had an encouraging meeting with her. I understand that the action plan should be completed by the end of the month.

The key issue that arose from our meeting was that although a significant number of vulnerable witnesses are women, the document does not contain women's perspectives. Furthermore, women's organisations were not represented on the working group that developed the document. We hope that, if further work is done, that gap will be acknowledged and good use will be made of the expertise of women's organisations. That would partly address the feeling among women's organisations that they are consulted only once a document is produced. It might be useful to get either Jim Wallace or Angus MacKay to talk to us about specific recommendations on that subject.

The committee will be aware that a document on stalking has been issued. It does not acknowledge that stalking is, to a large extent, a gender-specific problem. Most people who are stalked are women and the stalker is often known to the person being stalked. The media often focus on high-profile celebrity stalking incidents, but it is important to remember that the biggest problem is to do with women being stalked by ex-partners.

At the second of our meetings, we talked to Jackie Baillie, the Deputy Minister for Communities. We raised with her some of the issues that the committee had highlighted about funding for women's organisations. We talked about the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' guidelines on supporting women in crisis. We also examined ways in which the equalities unit and the minister can work with the committee. It would be useful to invite Jackie Baillie to the committee as the meeting that we had was constructive and there was a wish for everyone to work together on the equalities agenda rather than operate in parallel universes. Clearly, we would want to inform a lot of the work that is done by the equalities unit.

The Convener: Are there any questions for Johann?

Members: No.

The Convener: We are still trying to get Jim Wallace and Jackie Baillie to attend future meetings on different issues. When they come, we can also question them on the issues that have been raised today.

Michael McMahon will now present his report on race issues.

Mr McMahon: At the previous meeting, I said that I would try to get the issue of travellers on the agenda for the next meeting of the group. That has now been arranged: several travellers associations will be represented at next Tuesday's meeting of the race reporters group. Although that will be a priority on our agenda, we will also discuss progress on other issues. An e-mail about the meeting has been sent out, but I will circulate it again with a fuller agenda.

The Convener: Are there any questions for Michael?

Members: No.

The Convener: Nora Radcliffe will now present her report on sexual orientation issues.

Nora Radcliffe: Although the group has met, the minute of the meeting has not yet been written up. As soon as it is, I will e-mail it to all committee members.

The Convener: Are there any questions for Nora?

Members: No.

Correspondence

The Convener: The final item on the agenda is correspondence. Members have a copy of what has been received and, if they want to see anything, they can get in touch with Martin Verity or Alison Taylor.

That is all the business. Thanks for your attendance.

Meeting closed at 11:43.

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