

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 20 June 2000
(Morning)

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

15th 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

Kate Bilton (Scottish Executive Equality Unit)

Esther Breitenbach (Scottish Executive Equality Unit)

Subhash Joshi (Positive Action in Housing)

Najimee Parveen (Positive Action in Housing)

Robina Qureshi (Positive Action in Housing)

Yvonne Strachan (Scottish Executive Equality Unit)

Shona Simon (Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Officer)

Judith Tinkel (Positive Action in Housing)

CLERK TEAM LEADER

Martin Verity

ASSISTANT CLERK

Alison Campbell

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 20 June 2000

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:03*]

The Convener (Kate MacLean): Let us get started. As the witnesses for item 1 have not yet arrived and the witnesses for item 2 will not arrive until later, perhaps we should start with item 3 on the agenda.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): What is the problem?

The Convener: The witnesses have not arrived.

Malcolm Chisholm: They have—I have just been talking to them.

The Convener: Sorry. There seems to have been a mix-up. We will take a couple of minutes to get the witnesses in.

10:04

Meeting adjourned.

10:07

On resuming—

Housing

The Convener: I welcome the witnesses to this meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee. Perhaps it would be useful if you introduced yourselves first.

Subhash Joshi (Positive Action in Housing): I am Mr Joshi, the chairman of Positive Action in Housing. Our presentation this morning will be conducted by Robina Qureshi, Najimee Parveen and Judith Tankel. The organisation has been working with the ethnic communities in Glasgow on housing issues, and this morning we will tell the committee about our work and the difficulties that are associated with it. First, Robina will talk about under-representation in the housing sector.

Robina Qureshi (Positive Action in Housing): When I looked back at evidence that other groups have given to the committee, I was almost paralysed by the stress on physical evidence such as facts and figures and up-to-date research. I am not against such evidence, but our problem is the lack of accurate and up-to-date information on the housing needs and aspirations of Scotland's black

and ethnic minority communities.

For example, in the Scottish house conditions survey, the specific unmet needs of black and ethnic minority people are subsumed and regarded as so statistically unimportant that they do not merit a mention in the final report. Although, over the past 10 years, there have been bits of research here and there, there has been nothing consistent to give a real indication of the housing needs of Scotland's black and ethnic minority communities. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations provides statistics through its quarterly Scottish continuous recording system—or SCORE—report; however, those statistics apply only to lets, so the information is quite bare.

Although Positive Action in Housing is trying to address that problem by devising a national monitoring system with other black groups across Scotland, the Scottish Executive and Scottish Homes have a role in ensuring that consistent and up-to-date information is available for public and voluntary sector housing bodies.

We would also like to comment on the complete absence of thinking on the issues and concerns of our communities within the housing green paper, especially as it goes against the spirit of mainstreaming to which the Government is committed. I am sure that that will come out in our discussion.

We have made a detailed response to the housing green paper. We ask for a specific race and housing strategy to cover Scotland, which addresses issues such as area preference, ring-fenced development funding, strategic support for black housing associations, the development of larger units in multiracial areas where demand exists—including Glasgow and Edinburgh—the need for sheltered housing schemes, and support for schemes to address under-representation of black workers through training.

The committee may be aware that Scottish Homes is consulting on its race equality strategy. We are again disappointed that key aspects of the original strategy have been dismantled, including ring-fenced development funding and the appointment of a race equality officer. There is also the complete failure to support black and minority ethnic housing associations, which would have ensured a degree of empowerment for ethnic minority communities. The failure to include that strategy is the sole reason why ethnic minorities are so under-represented at every level within Scottish housing today.

We also note that while Scottish Homes is consulting on its race equality strategy and producing ideas for that strategy, it has failed its race equality targets on issues such as committee representation, mainstreaming equality and the

recruitment of black workers. Scottish Homes' policy has also failed to consider black-led housing associations.

Last year we dealt with 1,300 inquiries. Of those, the biggest three problems given by people as reasons for seeking rehousing were racial attacks and harassment, which comprised 18 per cent of our cases; overcrowding, which comprised 16 per cent of our cases; and homelessness, which comprised 28 per cent of our cases. Those cases came primarily from Glasgow and Edinburgh, although we accept referrals from anywhere in Scotland. From our work with local black and minority ethnic groups, we know that those problems reflect the picture in other parts of Scotland too. There is also a need for sheltered housing for black and minority ethnic elders in Glasgow and Edinburgh. A handful of schemes have been set up to address the needs of Chinese and Jewish elders, but other ethnic groups, including Indian and Pakistani elders, still lack specific provision; that is why people are voting with their feet and not taking up access to mainstream sheltered housing. Despite the efforts of a handful of agencies, our social housing is still almost exclusively geared to the needs of a white society.

Unless the committee uses the opportunity that is presented by the housing green paper, we will continue to witness a movement that is failing in its responsibility to challenge institutionalised racism. That manifests itself—as I said earlier—in failing race targets, token participation by black groups on quangos and management committees, predominantly white work forces and an overall decrease in black tenancies at a time when housing needs in the poorest black communities have never been greater. There has been an elevenfold increase in black overcrowding in the past 10 years and a dramatic increase in racist attacks, yet racists keep their homes while black families are forced out.

Black elders are voting with their feet to avoid the alienation of mainstream sheltered housing. Homeless black families continue to be allocated housing in no-go areas, despite their protestations that they face being singled out for racist attacks. Racist attacks on some of the most voiceless people in our society are also on the increase, as 2,500 asylum seekers are dispersed to Glasgow on a derogatory and discriminatory voucher scheme in rundown council estates where no one else wants to live and which are renowned as no-go areas for visible minorities.

On a day-to-day level, black advice agencies find that their complaints of racist stereotyping are often played down or ignored altogether, despite repeated calls from black groups and housing providers alike. Scottish Homes is still not listening

to calls for community empowerment through black housing associations. Despite a mass of initiatives by the Government to tackle social exclusion and promote partnership, the only black and minority ethnic-led race and housing agency in Scotland, PaiH, has not been invited to sit on the Scottish housing advisory panel alongside its mainstream national partners.

There has been much talk about the Macpherson report. The onus of that report is on organisations and institutions, including policymakers, funders, membership bodies and grassroots housing providers, to examine their processes, attitudes and behaviour and the way that racism has developed in their sector, to eliminate its impact and to show that they are not disadvantaging any section of the community.

We believe that Scottish Homes must face that situation, provide ring-fenced funding and address some of the issues that were mentioned earlier. We also believe that the Scottish Executive must publish a national housing policy that is geared to the needs and aspirations of a multiracial society and require every public and social landlord to implement a black and minority ethnic housing strategy with proper targets and penalties for non-implementation.

Finally, I will say again that we deserve our place round the table of the Scottish housing advisory panel.

10:15

Najimee Parveen (Positive Action in Housing): I have been asked to speak briefly on under-representation in the housing sector. I am on the management committee of PAIH, but I am also the director of Positive Action for Training in Housing, which was set up to address issues of under-representation in housing employment. The rationale behind PATH is that the research and statistics that are collated about black and minority ethnic people highlight disadvantage and inequalities. The percentage of black and minority ethnic people who are out of work and looking for work is more than double that of white communities. Even with qualifications, people in black and minority ethnic communities are still more likely to be unemployed. The unemployment rate of people with degrees in black communities is more than twice that of white people with the same qualifications.

In-depth analysis of income data for black households reveals alarming facts. Black and minority ethnic communities are four times more likely to live in poverty than white families. There are high unemployment levels amongst men, low levels of economic activity by women, and low pay. That all contributes to a situation in which 60

per cent of families fall below the unofficial poverty line set by half the average households.

On housing, Scottish Homes' evaluation of its race equality activity showed that of the associations that undertake ethnic monitoring, minority ethnic composition of housing association management committees fell from 3.2 per cent to 1.1 per cent in 1996-97. Black staff employed by housing associations rose from 0.4 per cent to 1.1 per cent, however those figures do not reflect the fact that in multiracial areas the figure is still exceedingly low in comparison with the composition of the community.

PaiH, in its response to the Scottish Homes review of the ethnic minority housing strategy for Glasgow in 1995-98, recommended that Scottish Homes set targets of up to 5 per cent of black and minority ethnic workers across Glasgow and much higher in multiracial areas. Scottish Homes also set itself the target of increasing the percentage of black employees from 0.4 per cent to 1.4 per cent. However, that has not happened—in May 1998, the figure was 0.8 per cent.

In relation to access of black communities to housing association and Scottish Homes stock, targets of 1.25 per cent were set to directly benefit black and minority ethnic communities. However, in 1997-98 there was a reduction in the proportion of new houses that were let to black households from 1 per cent to 0.2 per cent.

It is clear that, for under-representation to be tackled effectively, ethnic monitoring must be carried out on all aspects of housing sector provision. Targets must be set for the housing sector in relation to the employment of black staff and membership of management committees.

Judith Tankel (Positive Action in Housing): I am on the management committee of PaiH, but I am also on the management committee of the Glasgow Jewish Housing Association. Before that, housing was provided through the Jewish welfare, in which I was a social worker for many years. That was before there were policies regarding ethnic minorities. We saw a need; people needed the houses; and in those days it cost about £200 to get a really nice flat. We collected around the community and provided that money. Our work grew from there. Glasgow City Council was most understanding; when it knocked down the Gorbals, we shared the price of providing flats. That is how we started, and we just got on with it. I have the experience of knowing what our tenants want and need, but that is not provided by any organisation that is not ethnic-minority led. I feel that very strongly.

We have taken a twin-track approach, providing services to both the Jewish community and the wider community. We have just started a project

with the Chinese, indigenous and Jewish communities all working together in Battlefield. That project is working wonderfully, because the Jewish community, as an ethnic minority community, knows what people want—we are able to provide what they want and we listen to them. Other people do not listen. Scottish Homes' idea of what people want is to devise a policy, take it around focus groups and get people on to management committees, but that is not what people want; Najimee Parveen just gave you the statistics that prove that.

I am terribly upset with Scottish Homes. Who makes the policy—the Scottish Parliament or Scottish Homes, which says, "You will do what we want?" Scottish Homes imposes policies and gives out little droplets of funding—just enough to keep people quiet—for business plans. However, it does not give out enough funding to pay for a director of a black and ethnic minority-led housing association. It calms down the situation, but it does not permit ethnic minority-led housing associations to flourish. Such associations must, and will, come.

Apart from our mainstream housing, we provide sheltered housing and extra care housing. I cannot begin to imagine how someone from an Asian or Chinese community could possibly function in the average residential, sheltered or extra care housing situation. They are isolated, they speak the wrong language, their feeding habits are wrong and the things that they need, such as washing facilities, are not provided. People in general do not understand those problems—you have to come from one of the minority communities to be able to understand what people from those communities want. It is so colonial—I hate to use that word—and patronising for people to say, "This is what you want and this is what we are giving you." Only people from the communities fully understand what they want. Things must change and I just wish that they would change sooner, so that all those people who are suffering, needlessly, would no longer suffer. So often, people from ethnic minority communities get put into somewhere where there are no other people from ethnic minority communities around them—they will be the only dark face, which is upsetting. People feel isolated and frightened.

When we rehouse people into our sheltered housing complex, their reaction is absolutely astonishing. Members of the committee will not know this, but anti-Semitic graffiti is constantly being put up in the tenement flats, which makes people nervous. Three or four of the people whom we rehoused were frightened to go out—they were nervous wrecks, but now they are happy, satisfied citizens. Such a service can be provided only by ethnic minority-led housing associations, and the sooner that such associations are established, the

better.

Members must understand how difficult the situation is. Scottish Homes will not support those associations. As I said, they give little drops of funding for business plans, but unless funding is provided to pay for a qualified director, one cannot run a housing association these days. The days of people coming along as volunteers, and putting in whatever time they have, are over—one cannot run a professional housing association like that and still be able to meet the standards that Scottish Homes, quite properly, requires.

If members have any questions, I will be happy to answer them. I feel that the policy has failed and we must listen to people. Tenant representatives are not on committees—their language skills are not wonderful and they are frightened to speak up. They will speak up only if the organisation is run by their own people. We have proved that ethnic minority-led housing associations will not produce ghettoisation. Our next project will be for the Asian community—why should people not be able to do what they want? I am sorry to sound so passionate, but I feel very passionate about this.

The Convener: That is okay—we do not mind people coming along and sounding passionate.

Do you want to say anything, Mr Joshi?

Subhash Joshi: No—we will take questions from members.

The Convener: I will pick up on what Judith Tankel said about the building requirements for developing sheltered housing in particular. Robina Qureshi spoke about ring-fenced development funding. Could you expand a little on that? What reactions have you had to your proposals for such funding?

Robina Qureshi: In the original strategy for 1995-98, Scottish Homes had a policy for specific, ring-fenced funding. That followed on from the work of the Housing Corporation in supporting black and ethnic minority communities in England, where there had been a surge in housing partnerships that involved ethnic minority communities. Ring-fenced funding means that a specific amount of money will be earmarked to address ethnic minority housing needs. For example, as Judith Tankel mentioned, there are specific design, religious and dietary needs that sheltered housing for ethnic elders must address. If we had ring-fenced funding, those issues could be addressed; we could also address the housing needs of larger families. If a specific amount of money is identified and earmarked to address ethnic minority housing needs, housing associations and Scottish Homes will become accountable for that funding. There is a clear need for new developments, and earmarked funds

would address long-term disadvantage and historical discrimination.

The Convener: Did you say that there was no mention of ring-fenced development funding in the green paper?

Robina Qureshi: There is no mention of it in the latest Scottish Homes consultation document on its race equality strategy, which leaves it up to housing providers to claim money in the name of ethnic minorities.

Malcolm Chisholm: Thank you for your presentations. It is timely that you are here, because we are trying to respond to the Scottish Homes document and any day now we will receive the next instalment of the Executive's housing policy. Your comments will help us to respond to those documents.

You said that the green paper was colour blind. You have covered most of the territory, but what would you like to be in the next stage of that paper, which will be the last instalment before the bill is introduced after summer?

Robina Qureshi: The problem is that the green paper gives no consideration whatever to race equality issues. It is called a green paper, but it is colour blind—that is the contradiction.

We would have liked the housing needs of black and ethnic minority communities to be assessed separately for the first time. You must remember that, since the 1950s and 1960s, when the first large number of immigrants came to Scotland from places such as India, Pakistan and other countries, those people's housing requirements have not been considered; nor has there been any consideration of what housing providers should do, both in relation to the provision of housing and to tackling problems such as racial harassment.

We are still dealing with council estates where there are almost no-go areas. The housing green paper could have addressed that situation. It could have addressed the situation whereby if you are involuntarily homeless and claim housing from the local authority, you are given one offer only—often of accommodation in a no-go area—and it is difficult to get the housing provider to revoke that offer. The bottom line is that people do not want to live in areas where they will be subjected to violence, terrorism and possibly attacks and murder.

The primary consideration for the poorest and most marginalised people who come to organisations such as Positive Action in Housing is the safety of the area. People will turn round and say, "Give us two rooms—just give us a safe area." The housing green paper had a chance to address that, and I do not know whether, in the final stage, there will be separate consideration of

housing for ethnic minority communities. If there is not, there certainly should be and the Equal Opportunities Committee should put pressure on the Executive to give that consideration. The Government talks about mainstreaming, but where is the mainstreaming of race equality in the housing green paper and the forthcoming housing bill?

Najimee Parveen: Positive Action in Housing made a number of recommendations in its response to the green paper. Those recommendations include: development of national performance indicators on race equality; development of a national policy on ethnic monitoring across all public and voluntary sector housing provision, inclusion of the transfer of responsibilities under section 71 of the Race Relations act 1976 in any transfer of responsibilities to new landlords; an agreed national strategy for joint working on racial harassment; a review of national and local policies on homelessness and how those policies specifically affect black and minority ethnic communities, and so on. I know that the Commission for Racial Equality also responded to the green paper and I suppose that time will tell whether any of those recommendations were taken on board.

Judith Tankel: I am sure that the green paper should refer to equal opportunities and to support from Scottish Homes for ethnic minority-led housing associations, not just for white-led housing associations. If an organisation can be viable, why should it be denied funding, as is happening at the moment, because that organisation is black-led, or ethnic minority-led, rather than white-led?

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Why do you think that your recommendations have been rejected? It would be useful if you could speak about the feedback that you received. I consider your suggestions and proposals to be fairly reasonable. Have you been told why they have been rejected, as seems to be the case?

Could you also speak about private landlords, about whom there is little in the green paper, apart from some limited reference to houses in multiple occupation. I know that Shelter is concerned about that and thinks that we should consider toughening up our ability to prosecute landlords who either harass tenants or evict them unlawfully. I know that you concentrated on the public sector and housing associations, but do you have comments about the relationship between private sector landlords and ethnic minority communities?

10:30

Robina Qureshi: I want to give you, as the

Equal Opportunities Committee, a grass-roots feel for the situation. Public sector agencies would like to be seen to be addressing equality and practising social inclusion, so if they can get one black face on a committee, that is, in terms of numbers, a significant percentage—they can say, “This is a success.” However, it is not a success from the point of view of the people who are facing the problems of exclusion from power, representation and housing—the worst cases are the ones that are lying on our books for years and are not being addressed. Is that because we have an all-white Scottish Parliament? I do not know, but extra pressure must be levied, if not for that reason alone, then to make sure that concerns are addressed, not in a tokenistic manner, but in terms of what really affects communities and what will make a difference. Right now, percentage points in Scottish Homes policy documents are defined as successful, but the policies are not making a difference for people on the ground.

Respect must be shown to those agencies, including ours, that are not being adequately consulted by bodies such as Scottish Homes. We are a front-line agency on race and housing and we cover the whole of Scotland. We are the only agency that does that, but we have rarely been consulted by Scottish Homes or involved in the development of policy documents such as the race equality strategy. That is an important issue. We are talking about social inclusion, so why are black organisations being excluded?

Shona Robison: Would you go as far as saying that some of those public agencies are guilty of institutional racism?

Robina Qureshi: There is no doubt about that. Anyone who says that those agencies are not guilty of it does not see what is happening on the ground. You have to question why those agencies are not addressing the issues on the ground. There is a wealth of evidence from black groups and organisations across the country. The question is whether the public sector agencies are guilty of institutionalised racism by using numbers.

Shona Robison: Do you think that there should be more powers to deal with unlawful eviction or discrimination by private landlords? That issue is largely ignored by the green paper.

Robina Qureshi: The housing green paper should have addressed it, particularly as a significant percentage of the poorest section of ethnic minority communities relies on private sector landlords. Those people will be stuck with high rents and will not have access to the full amount of housing benefit. Families who are deemed as overcrowded by the rent registration office are refused housing benefit on the grounds that the rent is wrong for their accommodation and that the accommodation is not suitable for their

needs. Those issues all come down to housing planning policies, which have failed to provide for people who have larger families. More consideration should be given to the issue of private landlords.

Najimee Parveen: There is a range of issues to do with the private sector. Over the past couple of years, the Commission for Racial Equality has had to deal with a case in which estate agents have been accused of not wishing to sell a house to someone from the black and minority ethnic communities. That was a big issue in Scotland but no one has addressed it in terms of the implications or what agencies can do in response to clear direct or indirect discrimination. It was a landmark case, but it is not being discussed in detail by any agency, as far as I can tell.

The Macpherson report brought the issue of institutional racism to the fore in Scotland for white communities, but black communities have debated the concept of institutional racism and what it means for them for years. The report highlighted institutional racism for white communities—people are now looking at action plans in response to the Macpherson report—but black agencies are concerned that there will be paper policies and that there will not be a lot of action on the real issues that arise for communities.

Subhash Joshi: May I address the private sector issue? Many in the ethnic minority community face difficulties in the private sector, depending on who they are dealing with. A white landlord may not want coloured people living in his house. That is a problem. That is why the ethnic communities have looked at housing as an investment. Students have picked up many of the properties for private let. There are problems of exorbitant rents being charged. This is an area that needs to be addressed if there is to be fairness and equality.

Judith Tankel: Scottish Homes is used to dealing with a number of large housing associations—it likes to deal with them and it favours them. However, the cake cannot only be cut up into so many slices. I do not know how encouraging Scottish Homes is to new housing organisations. I know that Scottish Homes likes to have economies of scale, which is perfectly understandable when there is a large number of units. When an organisation with which I am involved wanted to do a project, it was told that another organisation was the favoured one in the district and so should forget it. That should not happen. Any ethnic minority housing association will be a new one, but will Scottish Homes want to encourage it? I know that it will not.

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): I do not know who will answer this question, but I will put it to Robina, who talked

about the police tackling harassment and racism in housing. I want to ask about local authorities and housing associations. If the training and awareness of officers in local authorities and housing associations are not adequate, there will still be a problem, because even if the policies are the right ones they will not be implemented properly. How far away is a good level of training and development on racial awareness? Do you think that the housing stock transfers are going to offer any solution or will there still be a problem for that type of development?

Robina Qureshi: I do not see how the housing stock transfer will make any difference in raising awareness. Is that what you are asking?

Mr McMahon: Is there not potential in breaking the situation down to housing associations with greater awareness of local needs?

Robina Qureshi: I am not sure that I understand the question.

Najimee Parveen: This is a big issue and I am not sure that it will be addressed by housing stock transfer. We do quite a lot of work with housing associations and housing association management committees. Management committees consist of lay people who are not necessarily familiar with race and equality issues. Such committees are made up of people who are active in the community but who are not necessarily aware of issues relating to racial harassment. A lot of work will need to be done with management committees and with the staff of housing associations.

Subhash Joshi: Positive Action in Housing is doing a lot of work with housing associations on racial harassment. As members know, we have produced a report. Since then, we have run training sessions and I am delighted to say that many of the housing associations have sent people for training on such issues. There is a long way to go, but at least a positive step has been taken. We are offering the training continuously.

Najimee Parveen: The training would not necessarily be on race awareness. We are not interested in attitudinal training. We focus on training that will address people's behaviour within organisations, how they support and deal positively with people who are facing racial harassment, how they examine race equality issues and how they approach direct and indirect discrimination within the housing association where they work. We are not particularly interested in training around issues of race awareness because that does not always work. We want people to consider whether their behaviour or the policies and procedures in the housing sector operate to the disadvantage of black communities and how that can be

addressed.

Robina Qureshi: However, there is a definite culture in the public sector and the housing association sector in which it is thought that racial harassment is used as an excuse for a better house. That culture is pervasive. That is why I do not think that the housing stock transfer will make a difference—it will be the same culture. That is how far we have still to go.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Robina, on page 6 of your submission you say that one of the difficulties is the absence of figures disaggregated according to ethnic origin. Would you agree that, in the absence of such figures, it is difficult to get the information that we need and that all we are left with are assertions about housing need for people from ethnic minority backgrounds? What kind of research is needed to get a baseline figure?

Robina Qureshi: As I said, it has been very difficult to get hold of information; we have to rely on our own monitoring of the 1,300 cases that we dealt with in 1999, our work with other black and minority ethnic groups, anecdotal evidence or bits of research that have been carried out because they were commissioned or a pot of money was made available. That is not effective. We would like information on the level of under-representation of black committee members, staff and tenants within housing organisations so that we could make comparisons with local housing needs and the national picture. We also want to know the extent of overcrowding and problems of racial harassment. There is a high level of under-reporting to institutions by clients, so information would be difficult to gather. We would want to know the extent of black homelessness and compare that locally.

Those are just some of the figures that we need. However, no professional approach is being taken at the moment and that needs to be addressed urgently. National and local figures must be available to allow agencies such as ours and politicians to access that information, make reasonable judgments and help housing advisers to address local housing need.

10:45

Tricia Marwick: You say:

"Black and ethnic minority communities face: a severe shortage of suitable housing in multiracial areas; severe over-crowding; disproportionately greater levels of homelessness than within the white communities . . . a high projected need for sheltered housing for black and minority ethnic older people".

I suggest that all those are assertions from your research, rather than baseline information with which everyone from Scottish Homes to the

Scottish Executive to Positive Action in Housing could agree.

Najimee Parveen: The assertion is made not from Positive Action in Housing's research, but from research that has been carried out by various organisations in Scotland, such as the Scottish ethnic minorities research unit, which has done a lot of work on race and housing. Recently, the Scottish Executive published "Researching Ethnic Minorities in Scotland: report of a workshop held on 2 March". That report contains the same information. I agree that there is no overall baseline information.

Tricia Marwick: That is my point. Until that baseline research is incorporated into the housing statistics, there will always be disagreement. Should we not first reach agreement about the research and monitoring that needs to be done?

Robina Qureshi: The problem is that mainstream housing agencies are not getting the picture of black housing needs because people are not going to those agencies. People are turning to black organisations and locally or nationally based minority ethnic groups for help with housing problems. We refer that information to the housing agencies. That is how the information is being passed on. What they do with the information and what we do with it are two different things. In the majority of cases, housing agencies subsume it, forget it and file it away. There are some examples of housing providers working well, but generally they do not. For example, Glasgow City Council reported that the number of racial incidents in its area from January to March increased from four to six. In that same period, we dealt with about 100 racial incidents in the Glasgow area. Even though we work directly with Glasgow City Council, there is a clear difference.

We pull together statistics from various research sources, including the Scottish ethnic minorities research unit, as Najimee said. However, the Scottish Executive and Scottish Homes are not taking a strategic approach. They should be giving us the information. Without that information we are working blind on the basis of anecdotal evidence from black organisations and those agencies that have their finger on the pulse.

Tricia Marwick: I think that you are agreeing that we need that kind of information as a baseline.

Najimee Parveen: We have recommended that in our response to the green paper. However, that does not mean to say that we should not use the information that we have at the moment to argue our point. Every agency should address the issue.

Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): Good morning and thank you for

coming to speak to us. My concept of the problems that you are highlighting is that an ethnic or minority group would be better included within a cohesive group in a locality. You seem to be suggesting that you would prefer individual localities to be set aside specifically for ethnic or minority groups. I would have thought that that would aggravate the situation and create a distinction between the indigenous population and the ethnic minority.

Robina Qureshi: We are not saying that. We are lobbying for empowerment of all communities, including people from ethnic minorities. Housing provision has been made available for people with disabilities, older people and other people with unmet needs, and we are asking for the same thing. We are not asking for specific localities—we already have ghettos. We do not want no-go areas. We want the colour-blind mainstream provision to be complemented by specific housing associations with minority ethnic management committees that will address the needs of all communities. That is the specific definition of an ethnic minority housing association.

Subhash Joshi: We are not seeking to be isolated and have the unit to ourselves. We want integration. We want to live in harmony with the community but we also want to be recognised as a group that has special needs.

Mr Munro: If an area were designated specifically for the housing needs that you are suggesting, that would signify that the resources had been supplied only for a minority group. Why not have the housing need dealt with in the community in a way that was not distinct?

Robina Qureshi: Our proposal would deal with the needs of everyone in the community. It would prioritise the allocations policy so that issues such as racial harassment would be considered, as would the provision of housing for larger families. It would deal with concerns that have been left to the side for many years.

In the 10 years that we have been lobbying on this issue, overcrowding in the black communities has multiplied by 15 times in Scotland. Racial harassment has multiplied as well. This year has shown a dramatic increase of racial incidents on the year before. Homelessness has increased. Those problems arise primarily because such needs are not being addressed by the mainstream policies and planning systems.

In a typical example of an ethnic minority-led housing association in London, 56 per cent is made up of various ethnic minorities and the other 44 per cent is white. That is a good example of an equal opportunities housing association. It provides for people in housing need.

Malcolm Chisholm: Robina Qureshi has made

the point that I was going to make about the misunderstandings that exist about ethnic minority-led housing associations. I should declare an interest as a member of the management committee of Apna Ghar housing association. We intend to say something on this subject in our response to the Scottish Homes race equality policy. Page 6 of the policy document says that Scottish Homes supports the further development of registered social landlords for minority ethnic-led housing where those are the most appropriate means of meeting identified needs. What would be your response to that claim by Scottish Homes?

Judith Tankel: That it should put its money where its mouth is.

Robina Qureshi: I would ask to see the costing and a strategy. How will ethnic minority communities be involved? How will it be ensured that everyone in that community is involved rather than a few hand-picked members? If we could see a detailed and costed strategy, rather than a claim to support the idea, we would be happy.

Najimee Parveen: Scottish Homes carried out an evaluation of its race equality activity, which showed that a number of external agencies considered the establishment of a minority ethnic-led housing association to be key to judging the agency's commitment to addressing race and housing issues. However, among Scottish Homes staff, there appear to be varying interpretations of current policy. That ambiguity might leave the agency open to accusations of unfair treatment or discrimination. The situation is worsened by the fact that the agency's race equality policy does not specify how the issue of black-led housing associations will be approached.

Robina Qureshi: In 1993, the CRE's report on its investigation into housing associations and racial equality said that, unless Scottish Homes provided support to black and minority ethnic housing associations, in the terms that I have described, there would be doubts about the agency's record on racial equality. I want it on the record that we have serious doubts about Scottish Homes' record on racial equality and its ability to deliver on racial equality without consulting agencies such as ours and involving us in an honest debate on the development of a race equality strategy. That has not happened. Scottish Homes is consulting on something that it has already made a decision on. We are not involved in the process. That is why, 10 years on, we are still talking about the same problems.

Malcolm Chisholm: One of the fundamental problems is that the situation has not been monitored. However, we will, I hope, be able to talk about what we have heard this morning. Would you say that the three main problems that we should be highlighting are overcrowding,

homelessness and attacks and harassment?

Robina Qureshi: Yes, along with the unmet housing needs of ethnic elders.

It is important to mention that asylum seekers coming into Scotland are in the same position as the parents of my generation were in the 1950s and 1960s. People assume that they will go back home, but a significant percentage will stay in this country. How will their needs be addressed? They are living in the areas in which our families do not want to live. They are being singled out for harassment and attacks. Families tell us that their children are not going to school because of the attacks that they have to face. That is a new hornets' nest to deal with.

Malcolm Chisholm: Obviously, your perspective is not being taken on board. It seems reasonable that your organisation should be represented on the housing advisory panel. Have you had any feedback on why you are not being involved in that body?

Robina Qureshi: No. We seem to be invisible to the people involved.

Judith Tankel: There is a black and minority ethnic housing association that is trying to get itself off the ground but cannot get funding from Scottish Homes. It has provided a business plan, but the process has come to a dead halt. No funding is forthcoming. Scottish Homes could fund it but it is not doing so.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Could you give us some details of that housing association? Perhaps the committee could make representations to Scottish Homes on the matter. Are there similar housing associations?

Judith Tankel: A while ago, the management committee of Apna Ghar was given money to produce a business plan, but that was it. It cannot get any more funding and is unable to function as a housing association as it does not have a director. People volunteer to help out, but a director is essential. The organisation has a lot of support—Malcolm Chisholm is involved, as am I—but it cannot get funding.

Robina Qureshi: Groups in Aberdeen and Edinburgh have found themselves in the same situation. The situation is not too depressing, as the organisations are not floundering. This committee could bring some influence to bear, however. We talk about social inclusion but we need to think about ways of integrating black and ethnic minority communities into Scottish housing. Groups such as Apna Ghar are trying to get off the ground but are not getting the support that they need from Scottish Homes.

Judith Tankel: I want to reassure John Munro that Apna Ghar will provide houses for the whole

community, not only for black and ethnic minority people. However, it will be able to take account of the needs of ethnic minority people.

Mr Munro: The concept would be appropriate and inclusive?

Judith Tankel: Definitely. What is important is that it will have an understanding of the needs of ethnic minority people that many people do not have. One must also bear in mind the housing needs of the elders, as Robina said.

Tommy Sheridan: Excuse my ignorance about that body—will you spell its name?

Judith Tankel: A-P-N-A G-H-A-R. It is Urdu for "our house". Those are the only two words of Urdu I know.

Tommy Sheridan: Is the organisation based in a particular area?

Judith Tankel: It is not based anywhere. We divide our meetings between Glasgow and Edinburgh. There are some high-powered people on the management committee, but we have found it impossible to get anywhere. We have been struggling for some years. Now that we have re-formed we are determined that we will get somewhere.

11:00

Tommy Sheridan: My experience is that, as a result of a transfer of stock from a local authority or a divestment of stock from Scottish Homes, tenants either register with an existing housing association or form a new one, which is given recognition by Scottish Homes. Is Apna Ghar a Scotland-wide organisation? Is there identified stock that it would take over or is it just agency based?

Judith Tankel: Apna Ghar would have stock if we could get it and if we had funding to run it. We cannot just take over stock—we must have a director, and the director would need a secretary. A considerable amount of administration is necessary so there must be paid staff—the organisation could not work without them. We cannot, however, get the money for staff.

Tommy Sheridan: I would like further clarification. When I read in your report about the necessity for black-led housing associations, I understood that to mean conventional housing associations. I also understood that there might be areas of Glasgow, Dundee and so on in which there are clusters of local authority stock that the black and ethnic communities might feel they could apply to manage and for which they could register as an association. I thought that that was what you were getting at.

Judith Tankel: Three or four years ago, I was at

a housing conference that Robina Qureshi organised. A gentleman from Scottish Homes came up to me and said, "It's great—we're going to transfer all this stock to Apna Ghar." The transfer never materialised, but if it had, someone would have had to run it.

Tommy Sheridan: Was such a transfer the original intention?

Judith Tankel: That was what Scottish Homes told us. I could tell you the name of the gentleman who told me that, but I will not do so here.

Tommy Sheridan: Will you comment on the co-operation the organisation has had in its dealings with local authorities? You mentioned Glasgow and Dundee several times in your evidence—are you involved with other local authorities?

Robina Qureshi: We are most closely involved with Glasgow City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council, primarily regarding the problems of families who live in severely overcrowded conditions and of people living in peripheral estates where they face racist attacks day in and day out. We try to have such people transferred to places in which they will not face harassment. We work daily on individual cases.

Our problem with all local authorities is the issue of like-for-like management transfers, in which people who have faced racist attacks are offered places in similarly hard-to-let areas where they are subject to further harassment because of the colour of their skin and because of their visibility. That problem is difficult to get across to local authorities. About seven local authorities, including Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute, are affiliated to us.

Tommy Sheridan: In your daily dealings, would you describe the co-operation that you get from local authorities as better or the same as that which you get from Scottish Homes and other housing associations?

Robina Qureshi: How would you define that co-operation?

Tommy Sheridan: You said that you work closely with Glasgow City Council, for example. I am aware that you have made representations on funding and so on in the past. Have those representations been successful? It appears from your evidence that you do not feel that Scottish Homes has taken your concerns on board.

Robina Qureshi: We get more co-operation from local authorities than we do from Scottish Homes, which needs to learn that it must consult openly and honestly with black and ethnic minority groups, no matter how inarticulate they are. By involving and engaging those groups, Scottish Homes will be able to inform its policy. If it can do

that, it will have a hint of grass roots in its policy. At the moment it does not—what comes across is that it is making the policy up as it goes along.

Tommy Sheridan: In relation to the housing bill that will come before the Scottish Parliament, it is important—while Positive Action in Housing is present—to make the point that we should try to ensure that there is black representation in our consideration of and formal consultation on the bill. I hope that Positive Action in Housing will be involved in that—it is vital that that voice is heard.

Michael McMahon mentioned stock transfers. One of my worries is that Glasgow, which already has a shortage of housing—especially suitable housing—stands to lose between 15,000 and 20,000 homes as a result of stock transfer. I am concerned that because there will be fewer homes to be distributed, some of the problems that PAIH has identified will not be alleviated but compounded.

Judith Tankel: That will be so especially if the right to buy—to which housing associations are totally opposed because it takes stock out of the public sector—is removed.

Tommy Sheridan: I do not think that that type of wholesale stock transfer will help us.

Tricia Marwick: You say that when families are offered unsuitable housing they might be subject to racist attack. Does Robina Qureshi agree that a general problem for homeless families—whether they are from a black or ethnic minority background or, indeed, from a white background—is that they are offered housing in the worst areas? They are offered housing that is in an appalling condition, often in areas where there is crime, drug dealing and vandalism.

Robina Qureshi: I agree that homeless people are offered the worst housing. I do not agree that they face the same experience whether they are black or white once they are allocated housing. I stress that the primary consideration of people who come to our door is what kind of area they will live in. Whatever community they come from, they are visible minorities. They are not looking for luxury or choice; they are looking out of necessity for a place to live. They need to be near multiracial communities where they will not be singled out or targeted.

Neither my colleagues nor I find the kinds of areas that are on offer to homeless people acceptable. In housing departments there is a complete lack of appreciation of racist attacks. The issue has been likened to putting Catholics in a Protestant area—that is the closest comparison I can give the committee. The comparison might not be exact but there are similarities, in that those from ethnic minorities who are homed in such areas are singled out and targeted for harassment

by racists who pick on people because of their visibility and their different dress, language, culture and colour. The situation is more aggravated when someone is faced with moving to an area that is not only worse, but could endanger their life or the lives of their family.

The Convener: I will take a final question from Johann Lamont and then the committee will decide how to take the matter forward.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I am interested in the previous point about people being safe. There is an obvious tension there, because we do not want to ghettoise people. There is also a danger in presuming that racist attacks and attitudes exist only in poor areas. The example that was given of the estate agent shows that racism is also an issue in well-off communities.

Tommy Sheridan mentioned housing stock transfer. There are debates about the figures and about the benefits that stock transfer will bring. If the stock transfer goes ahead, one of the issues with which people will have to wrestle, particularly in Glasgow, is the fact that the statutory responsibility for housing the homeless and people with specific needs will remain with the local authority. The local authority will have to negotiate delivery of that service with local housing organisations. What can witnesses tell us about meeting the needs of black and ethnic minority communities once responsibility for housing the homeless is devolved to local areas? What are the key elements that should remain with the local authority and which the authorities should write into local agreements and contracts?

Najimee Parveen: One of the recommendations that we made was that section 71 responsibilities should also be transferred. We hope that local authorities will continue to promote equality of opportunity and to eliminate racial discrimination. Committee members would have to examine the key aspects of the Race Relations Act 1976 as they relate to the housing sector. There are a number of other recommendations that we want to make, mainly about how to avoid direct and indirect discrimination. There is a code of practice for rented housing that makes a number of recommendations about racial harassment, access to housing, quality of housing and service provision. There is a range of materials that can be used when addressing the issue.

Johann Lamont: Obviously the committee cannot do so now, but it would be useful to get involved at an early stage. If discussions are ongoing and such matters are being examined, you could begin to write things into deals now, as they are being done. That would give your organisation and ethnic minority communities an opportunity to be influential.

Robina Qureshi: On safe communities, we do not want to create the impression that racist attacks happen only in peripheral and hard-to-let areas. Racism expresses itself in different ways. If someone went into one of the white enclaves in our cities, they might find it difficult to buy a house—there might not be racist attacks, but racism would still be there. People come to see us not because they do not want to live in such areas, but because they do not want to be singled out because they do not live in multiracial areas. It is symptomatic of living in deprived areas where there is a lot of poverty that people are singled out for direct physical racist attacks. That is what people are most concerned about.

The Convener: Thank you. Does Subhash Joshi want to say anything before we finish?

Subhash Joshi: No, other than that we are grateful to the committee for giving us the opportunity to present ourselves today.

The Convener: Thanks. The committee will now discuss how we take the matter forward. There are two issues, the first of which is the committee's response to the Scottish Homes race equality policy. The committee has not been invited to respond, but I suspect that members will want to. We will agree to respond.

Secondly, there is the housing bill, which we have a little more time for. As well as hearing from Jackie Baillie at our meeting on 4 July, I suggest that we invite Scottish Homes. The timing for that meeting is quite tight, so the committee would have to be very focused. It would be difficult to respond to the document without having Scottish Homes along. If anybody wants to get in touch with Positive Action in Housing before 4 July to pick up any points that have been raised, I assume that they are at liberty to do so. Is that right?

Subhash Joshi: Yes.

The Convener: Thank you. I hope that you are happy with that course of action.

Subhash Joshi: Yes. Thank you very much.

The Convener: I hope that Scottish Homes will be able to send someone to meet the committee. If it is necessary to have a special meeting, I will have to get in touch with people.

Mr McMahon: The race group has the matter on its agenda for next Tuesday. I hope to pull together a report for the meeting on 4 July.

11:15

The Convener: That would be very useful. We could finalise the report after we have taken evidence from Scottish Homes.

“Towards an Equality Strategy”

The Convener: The next item on the agenda is evidence on “Towards an Equality Strategy”. Everybody has had a copy of the report on the responses. The annexe includes a list of respondents. We are being offered the opportunity to examine the responses, of which there are a number. Today, we will hear from Yvonne Strachan, Esther Breitenbach and Kate Bilton from the Scottish Executive. As I said, Jackie Baillie is coming on 4 July to talk to the committee about the report.

Yvonne Strachan will lead. The committee will then have the opportunity ask questions.

Yvonne Strachan (Scottish Executive Equality Unit): I will make a couple of brief introductory remarks and then invite Esther Breitenbach, who is the research consultant for the equality unit, to give a little bit of background to the consultation exercise and analysis. That might help the committee to understand how the report should be looked at.

First, we are pleased to be here. We intend to provide the members of the Equal Opportunities Committee with an opportunity to discuss the report of the analysis of the responses to the consultation document “Towards an Equality Strategy”.

The minister will attend the committee meeting on 4 July. That will be an opportunity for the committee to explore the issues that emerge from the consultation and to express its views on how such matters should be taken forward. Today is an opportunity to examine the report, to discuss any practical or technical issues about the process and for us to offer any clarification that will help members in their deliberations.

I invite Esther Breitenbach to say a few words of introduction, which might help the committee to understand how the report was approached and to focus on the questions they might want to ask.

Esther Breitenbach (Scottish Executive Equality Unit): I want to do three things in introducing the report. First, I want to talk about distribution and how we got the report out to people. Secondly, I want to talk about the character of the report and how we undertook the analysis of responses. Thirdly, I want to touch briefly on the key themes that were discussed in the concluding section.

The consultation paper was distributed in January. The closing date for responses was 4 April. Approximately 4,000 copies of the consultation paper were distributed and it was available on the internet. As is pointed out on page

12 of the report, a range of bodies was included in the distribution—public, private, statutory, voluntary and business organisations, professional associations and so on. In addition, copies were sent to a number of individuals, for example, people in the research community who were known to have a track record in equal opportunities issues. Copies were also sent out on request to organisations and individuals. The paper was quite widely distributed within the Scottish Executive and it was distributed to other Government departments in Whitehall, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Office.

Because we were especially keen to get the consultation document out to groups that might be described as equality constituencies—women’s organisations, black and ethnic minority organisations, disability groups, lesbian and gay organisations and so on—we used a number of methods to ensure wide distribution of the document.

First, I have been responsible for compiling and administering the women’s organisations database in the Scottish Executive, which contains about 1,000 addresses. Secondly, we used addresses that had already been gathered for consultation purposes. Finally, we sought assistance from bodies such as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Positive Action in Housing—which has a directory of about 500 black and ethnic minority organisations—Disability Scotland and the Equality Network. We felt, therefore, that we had reached the appropriate constituencies that were active in the field from national to grass-roots organisations.

In addition, the document was available on the internet. The report indicates that there were about 1,600 hits on the English language version and suggests that that figure underestimates the number of copies that people might have received through that means. Furthermore, there were 241 hits on the community language versions of the document that were available on the internet. As a result, we can conclude that the 4,000 paper copies that were distributed is an underestimate of the total distribution.

Apart from circulation of the document, several meetings were held. One was with academic researchers, because the document contained questions on research, data and information. We had a series of meetings with a variety of other organisations. A note about those meetings is contained in an appendix to the report.

Once distribution was taken care of, the decision about how to analyse responses was prompted by a discussion with the women’s issues research advisory group, which advises me in my work.

There is a perception that Government consultations do not always result in good feedback to the people who respond or to the bodies that have a wider interest in what might emerge from such consultations. It was, therefore, felt appropriate that the equality unit should use the resources of the Scottish Executive's central research unit to produce an analysis of the responses. A primary reason for the way the report has been produced is that it should give a fairly full account of responses. Feedback should be as good as possible.

For several reasons, it has been beneficial to use the skills in the central research unit to produce the report. First, the equality unit consultation document is, in many respects, different from other consultation documents. Consultation papers that the Executive or other Government departments send out often focus on specific proposals for legislation or policy that seek consultees' agreement or disagreement. I am not saying that there is a typical consultation document or process, but the equality unit's process was somewhat different. The consultation document made a statement about endorsing some underlying principles and the general mainstreaming approach. Although the document asked some specific questions, it asked more general questions about people's response to the broad approach of mainstreaming equality. As a result, it is quite hard to analyse the responses—the answers do not necessarily indicate whether a certain proposal is good. It is not very easy to undertake a quantitative analysis, so any analysis must consider the quality and depth of responses, which is something that trained researchers are able to do effectively.

Secondly, it was felt also that we needed such qualitative research experience to give a reasonably full flavour of the range and complexity of responses. Thirdly—stressing again the requirement to provide good feedback to respondents and other interested parties—we felt that it was necessary to produce a report that would give as in-depth an analysis as possible in the time that was available. Although the report might be longer than some, other reports on consultation responses are as long or longer.

To carry out the analysis, the equality unit negotiated with the central research unit and employed two researchers. They were Alison Platts—who is a member of the CRU's permanent staff and is unable to be with us because she is on holiday—and Kate Bilton, who was employed on a temporary contract and who has worked with me in the equality unit. I have been responsible for liaising with the researchers from day to day, with Yvonne Strachan—as head of the unit—and with other colleagues in the unit.

The key point to stress is that our intention has been that the report should provide a good and relatively detailed account of what respondents to the consultation exercise said. We hope that respondents will feel that their views are represented and given their place in the report.

The report also indicates a range of views on a number of issues that are likely to stimulate further debate and discussion. Some of the responses reflect the fact that very complex issues must be dealt with in the equality strategy. I should also point out that, although 4 April was the official closing date, all the responses that were received after that date have been included in the report.

Committee members might have been confused by a small technical matter: although the tables in the early part of the report indicate clearly that there were 185 responses, the appendix lists 192 organisations as respondents to the consultation. The responses were numbered as they came in—with an identification number, if you like—and it emerged later that there were duplicates. Although the appendix appears to contain 192 organisations, it contains only 185.

It is also important to stress that the report is about feedback on responses; it does not make recommendations and it is restricted to analysis of responses. Obviously, taking responses into account in the development of an equality strategy is an on-going task for the equality unit.

I want briefly to run through the key themes, which are covered in the report's concluding chapter. First, the responses reflected a broad endorsement of the underlying principles and the mainstreaming approach of the proposed equality strategy. There was widespread support for the involvement in consultation of everyone who will be affected by the strategy, although there were different views on what should be the character of the consultation. For example, some people welcomed the openness of the document while others felt that there should have been more concrete proposals.

There was broad support for the principle of mainstreaming, although there were some differences of emphasis and understanding about what is meant by mainstreaming. In particular, some respondents said that although they approve of mainstreaming, it is important that a specific focus remains on different equality groups and the issues that are pertinent to them. Commitment to partnership working, consultation and on-going dialogue were also endorsed.

People expressed differing views about what equality and opportunity meant. That suggests that there is a need for clear definitions in statements.

There was also discussion about the need to state clearly that an equality strategy was about

tackling discrimination. I found interesting the discussion on the use of the word tolerant, to which some people reacted very strongly. We tend to think that tolerant has very positive connotations, but some people thought that it had negative connotations. That illustrates the need for clarity of definitions and use of language.

11:30

Another theme that emerged strongly was the need for a strategic approach with clear objectives and for a monitoring and evaluation framework that could indicate progress towards meeting objectives. Among the action areas that were stressed by respondents was the need for a training and development strategy and for the Scottish Executive to ensure the effectiveness of mainstreaming.

Awareness raising, internally and externally, was also regarded as important. Publicity campaigns such as zero tolerance were cited as the kind of activity that might be undertaken. Some people suggested that we should go further and introduce regulations and sanctions to promote good practice and equal opportunities.

There was general support for improvement to data and information, for participation and for the role of partners in funding adequate resources and support for developing the strategy. There was broad support for on-going consultation and communication and for involvement of a wide range of groups and individuals, especially those who were deemed to be disadvantaged.

A point was made about consultation fatigue. People have been subjected to many documents and may find it difficult to find the time or energy to respond, or may question what the end result of the consultation will be. Access issues were also mentioned in this context. They include issues such as format and language—community languages as well as plain English—and methods of encouraging participation. Several respondents thought that the Executive had to address the representativeness of the views that it sought and that there was a need to build an infrastructure for communication where that did not exist. Those respondents suggested that, where necessary, there should be a proactive role in seeking views.

Finally, many respondents suggested that there needed to be an acknowledgement of current and previous work on equal opportunities by agencies and bodies in Scotland, on which the strategy could build and on which the Executive could work in partnership with those organisations.

The Convener: You said that 4,000 copies were distributed. Were they distributed in accessible formats such as Braille, audiotape and languages that are minority languages in Scotland?

Esther Breitenbach: I do not have all the details to hand. The document was translated into community languages and certainly would have been available in a big-print version. I think that we had a Braille version.

Yvonne Strachan: We received one request for the document in Hindi and one request for it in Braille. Copies in those formats were made available.

The Convener: Obviously, as you accepted late submissions, people were not disadvantaged because they had to request the document in an accessible format.

Will the 185 respondents be consulted for feedback on whether they feel that their views have been taken on board?

Yvonne Strachan: The report on the consultation will be sent to everybody who responded to the consultation. We hope that they will see that not only their views but the views of other respondents have been reflected.

Mr McMahon: I have a similar question to yours, convener. It is about the on-going involvement that the report highlights. Does that pose problems for the Executive and for the organisations that have asked for continued involvement? Have you examined how a continuous programme of consultation and communication will be implemented?

Yvonne Strachan: The issue of communication and networking was a significant part of the consultation and the responses. The Executive's task is to consider the best way to reflect something that is an essential ingredient of mainstreaming. As we develop the strategy, we are considering how best we can maintain on-going involvement. These issues are under discussion with the respective equality groups. The race equality advisory forum is examining the issue of how best to consult and how to do so beyond the usual suspects. We are keen to develop the issue. I am sure that it is not easy to consult properly when one is trying to reach out to groups that have not become involved. We hope that we can work in partnership with others to determine the best way to do that.

Mr McMahon: An obvious implication of doing that will be resources. Has the Scottish Executive indicated that there will be adequate resources to continue the involvement and participation of both the equality unit and organisations, which hint, if they do not say so outright, that the consultation process is placing a burden on them? Has there been discussion about that issue?

Yvonne Strachan: Several issues arise from the question of whether there are resources to develop communication and networking.

Developing appropriate consultative networks is part of the work programme that the unit intends to pursue. Work on the resource implications is being done.

The question of whether individual organisations have the capacity to participate and engage with the Executive relates to funding and broader issues. It has to be examined in the process of discussion with those groups. I cannot comment on the issue of funding for organisations. It is raised in part of the consultation and the Executive will need to consider it in the course of discussing the strategy.

Esther Breitenbach: There is already a well-established framework for women's organisations through the database and the women in Scotland consultative forum, which has met regularly for some time. Regular mailings go out that are based on the database. Some of the mechanisms exist and are being developed but, as Yvonne Strachan says, it remains to be seen what will happen in the longer term.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): You acknowledged that the consultation was different, in that it did not focus on specific proposals but took a more general approach. A major criticism of the report was that it was a bit vague—it was full of warm words, where it could have outlined clearer targets, objectives and plans. How do you respond to such criticism? In retrospect, do you think that you should have chosen to carry out the consultation differently?

Yvonne Strachan: We welcome open and frank opinion. It is good to hear points that are constructive, whether they are negative or positive. As Esther Breitenbach said in her introduction, the intention was to raise some general points for discussion with groups that in many cases had never been engaged in discussion with the Executive. We are developing a strategy in an area of work that is not about a particular project or idea. It is about changing culture, and the way in which we think and do things. That requires a much longer-term approach and requires different things to happen. As a result, it was important to have the most open starting point, without any preconditions. Those points have been raised forcibly in the consultation, and we must take account of that in compiling the strategy document. I hope that the comments made during the consultation exercise will inform that process.

Irene McGugan: How do you plan to develop the strategy in the light of the responses that you have received, and what time scale are you working to?

Yvonne Strachan: Jackie Baillie will be at the Equal Opportunities Committee on 4 July, and we

see that as an important part of the process. We are currently discussing how we can engage in a wider debate with equality interests during the summer, and we intend to present a publication to Parliament in September.

Malcolm Chisholm: I am interested in the definitional aspects of this matter. I read an interesting submission from the Scottish Poverty Information Unit, whose main concern was the separation of equal opportunities and social inclusion, and how poverty could be integrated into all that. Were there any other submissions on that aspect? It is obviously a subject that people could write books about, but how do you deal with that and what relationships do you see between social inclusion and equal opportunities?

Yvonne Strachan: How the equality strategy will move forward in the light of the consultation has to be considered further. The relationship between social inclusion, particularly poverty issues, and equality is interesting. Some equality issues are relevant to social inclusion, and we therefore want to ensure that we have joined-up government, so that issues relating to equality and social inclusion are co-ordinated. There must be effective co-operative working between those parts of the Executive, and the equality unit certainly sees that task as important.

Malcolm Chisholm: You will not be here for item 4 on the agenda, but I can make this question relevant by saying that part of the strategy is to get work done on specific policy areas. One of the good things that you did was to commission work on transport from Reid Howie. Have you arrived at any conclusions on that, and will they be available to us soon?

Esther Breitenbach: The final version of the report on women and transport will be finished soon. The purpose of that research was to examine women's transport needs, as it was felt that much research on transport has been insufficiently focused. Although it is known that there are different usage patterns for men and women, women have not been asked what they think their needs are.

The research has also been commissioned with a view to producing guidelines on policy auditing, so that women's transport needs are considered. As I said, the final report is nearly ready, but we cannot be sure when it will be published, as it must be cleared and put through the appropriate channels. Guidelines will be piloted before being finalised for the policy auditing. We think that that approach is valuable in developing policy guidance that takes account of gender and other equality issues, and it is likely to be replicated in other policy areas.

There is a difficulty in working out exactly what

the distinction is between equality and social inclusion. However, the mainstreaming approach should certainly mean that the work of the social inclusion division is informed by an equalities perspective. Another piece of social inclusion work related to women's issues and partnership working, and that work will, I hope, emerge quite soon. Over time, I think that more integration can be achieved.

11:45

Johann Lamont: I want to cover more about how successful this consultation process has been. Would the level of responses received be considered to be within the normal range of responses for an equivalent consultation process?

You say that only 12 per cent of respondents were individuals and only 17 per cent are local authorities, which have a significant impact on women's lives. When you do the qualitative research, what kind of processes do you have to gauge particular themes from particular areas, instead of simply having percentage figures?

You mention policy areas in which respondents operated and groups for whom respondents worked. You also have a non-specific category. Does that hide information—for example, the fact that only 17 per cent of respondents work for women's organisations? It could also be argued that local authorities would have a huge responsibility.

You have said that 110 of the respondents under "Policy area in which respondents operated" were categorised as "Non-specific". They come from a non-specific group such as a local authority. Did they not comment on individual areas? If, for example, a local authority made specific mention of education or social work, would that have been counted as a non-specific response? If the respondent came from a local authority, would everything that they said simply be included under the general term?

Esther Breitenbach: I will answer the general question first, then I will ask Kate Bilton to answer the specific questions.

It is not easy to say whether the response rates were normal. That is partly because, as far as I am aware, there is no overall collation of what happens. Levels of response vary among consultations. Consultation documents can often be very different with regard to the breadth of the audience or how specifically focused they are on policy area or legislation. It is hard to ask whether the response is good or normal. We do not know the answer. Personally, I think that the level of response gives us quite a lot of substance. However, part of what was said in the response also tells us that we need more and wider

consultation.

Johann Lamont: An equality strategy is probably as broad a consultation process as we could get. Would you have expected more than 185 responses? In your organisation, is there a feeling that that is enough to work with but that, if you were starting the process, you would be seeking such a level of response?

Esther Breitenbach: We do not know the answer to that. We would have to take some soundings and to re-examine who responded. We might ask some of the people whom we might have expected to respond. There were comments about consultation fatigue and there were criticisms about the consultation being too general and too difficult to respond to, although other people welcomed it.

We can speculate about there being a lot of factors which might have stopped people responding, but we do not really know. It is worth trying to sound that out more. The consultation had a wide distribution, and I think that we did a good job getting to the groups that we wanted to target. We probably need to think further about why people have not responded to the document.

I will ask Kate to speak about the technical points.

Kate Bilton (Scottish Executive Equality Unit): There will be organisations that cover interests that are outwith their main purpose. A local authority will certainly cover issues concerning women, black and ethnic minority communities and others.

If a local authority had submitted responses that were focused solely on women's issues, or on women's issues and black and ethnic minority community issues, those responses would have been recorded in those specific categories. However, if the responses had contained only general information on the local authority's work and views, those responses would have been recorded as non-specific, even though they may well have contained specific comments relating to particular groups.

In analysing the responses, we considered whether we should look for themes that women's groups, or any other groups, tended to comment on, but we decided that that would be a difficult task. That was partly because of the time available; but also because it was not obvious whether people would want to know what women's groups had said or whether they would want to know what people had said on women's issues. There is a distinction there. The number of responses in each group made it less appropriate to pick out, for example, all the women's organisations that had responded or all the older people's organisations. There were only two in the

latter category, and picking them out would not have been representative of the whole community of organisations in that category. However, the information in the responses is still available.

Johann Lamont: On women's issues, it would be interesting to know whether the voluntary sector is saying something different from statutory organisations, or whether women's organisations are saying something different from those who provide the services. Would you decide not to say that 65 per cent had said that something was good if it emerged that 99 per cent of those who had said that were individuals, or came from one particular group, or were local authorities?

Kate Bilton: Further analysis could be done on that, if it were deemed appropriate.

Esther Breitenbach: A number of responses covered a range of equality areas, whereas others focused very specifically on one interest. There were women's organisations that talked about race equality and disability issues. That makes the analytical task harder, but, as Kate Bilton says, the information is there and it is possible to go back to do more analysis.

Yvonne Strachan: In addition to what is analysed, all the responses are available and will be used individually as well as collectively. Johann Lamont's points are well made. Such information will be of use to us in the course of the work that we do in the unit. That resource will be available to us.

Shona Robison: It is sometimes easy to be negative about consultation; but I was quite surprised when I read on page 23 of the report on the responses that, of those who commented, around three quarters were critical of aspects of the consultation paper's format or content. That is obviously quite a high percentage. The main criticisms were that the document was

"too vague, lacked a clear sense of direction or focus, and lacked specific proposals or information on existing work and contexts."

The paragraph continues:

"The lack of an analysis of the causes of inequality and of previous and current equality practices was perceived to weaken the document, as was the use of imprecise, bland language and meaningless phrases".

That feedback from 75 per cent of the respondents must have been a bit of an eye-opener. One respondent said that it was like fighting with candy floss. I must admit that, when I read the document, I felt that as well. It was difficult to get a handle on what was being said and what the document was trying to achieve.

On pages 26 and 27, you conclude:

"There was some divide among respondents as to whether the lack of detailed proposals enabled comments

to more actively direct the strategy's development or whether it demonstrated a lack of understanding of the issues and of thought on how the aims of the strategy would be achieved."

I presume that you would say that, as there is no lack of understanding within the unit, the lack of detailed proposals are a problem rather than the lack of understanding. Lessons can perhaps be learned from the 75 per cent of respondents who said that it is difficult to get a handle on the content, direction and meaning of such documents. You must have had discussions on that feedback in the unit. What early lessons have you learned, and how would you do things differently next time?

Yvonne Strachan: I would like to make a few practical points. Esther Breitenbach and Kate Bilton will correct me if necessary. "Of those who commented" means of those who commented on the format or content of the consultation; it does not mean that 75 per cent of all respondees made that point about the document. Kate will be able to provide the figures on that.

The points that are contained in the conclusion to that section of the report are not comments that either the unit or the Executive is making; those comments were expressed by the respondents. The question of whether the lack of detailed proposals or a lack of understanding had an impact was raised by different groups of respondees, and does not reflect the views of the unit on the way in which the exercise was completed. This conclusion is the analysis of the responses to the consultation, not the unit's evaluation of those responses.

Kate Bilton: People were critical of aspects of the document's format and content, although it is important to recognise that that does not mean that they found the whole document impossible to understand or felt that it should be completely rewritten. In this conclusion, we wanted to highlight the specific aspects of the document with which people had taken issue.

People were far more likely to comment on the document's format or content if they had a specific problem with the document. They were less likely to say that they particularly liked the style of the paper. I cannot give my interpretation of what the responses mean. The comments tended to be made by those who had comments to make on specific parts of the document; therefore, they are more likely to reflect the views of those who found problems with the document than the views of those who found it useful and were positive about it.

Shona Robison: It would be possible to find the document useful but still comment on the fact that the language that it uses is vague. I found the document useful, but I found the language vague.

It would be good to respond to that by making the language less vague next time.

Kate Bilton: Sure.

Esther Breitenbach: Kate, do you know off the top of your head how many people criticised the format or content of the document?

Kate Bilton: I think that that figure is in the interim report. I do not know it off the top of my head.

Esther Breitenbach: That 75 per cent is 75 per cent of a minority of respondents. It can be confusing. On the general point, it would be correct to say that the responses flagged up matters that require attention, and we will take that on board.

Yvonne Strachan: In answer to Shona Robison's point, we would want to consider any issues of that nature that were raised in the consultation. We are alive to issues about plain language and making things focused. Where there are matters to be addressed, we want to ensure that we deal with them. That point has been taken on board.

12:00

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): You mentioned the number of hits on the website. Do you have a feel for how much response was provoked by the fact that the consultation document was on the internet? Have you any way of tracking that?

Esther Breitenbach: I think that the answer is that we cannot tell. A lot of responses were sent by e-mail, but whether that means that people consulted—

Nora Radcliffe: I just wondered if there was any way of tracking that, but obviously there is not.

Esther Breitenbach: I do not think so, but we can make inquiries.

The Convener: I would have thought that it would be easy to find out from 185 people where they first heard about the document. That is a common question in questionnaires.

As there are no more questions, I thank our witnesses for coming along. As I said, Jackie Baillie will come to the committee on 4 July so that we can develop these matters further.

Petition

The Convener: The next item on the agenda is petition PE 139. Members will remember that at a previous meeting I asked the Scottish Parliament information centre to get us some information on what happens with translation in other Parliaments. Members should have copies of that information and the petition, plus various other papers.

We did not make a decision at the previous meeting on what to do with this petition. If we are looking at examples from elsewhere, we should aim to achieve best practice. The National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly are looking at this issue. Finland seems to have the best practice. Unless anybody has another suggestion, I suggest that we ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what it intends to do about this matter and highlight what is happening in Wales, Northern Ireland and Finland. Cathie Craigie's all-party group on sign language is being launched, and we could ask whether this is a matter on which it could pressure the SPCB. We are a new Parliament, and we should have best practice in access for everybody. That is an important issue that the committee and the all-party group can take up. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Transport (Scotland) Bill

The Convener: The next item is the Transport (Scotland) Bill. Members should have received papers on the bill and will probably know that the Transport and the Environment Committee is starting to take evidence at stage 1 tomorrow. It hopes to consider a draft stage 1 report on 4 July, which does not give us much time. Irene McGugan, did you have a suggestion to make?

Irene McGugan: Yes. From the perspective of the disability sub-group, issues regarding the disabled and transport are significant. The subject is mentioned only briefly in the bill. The provisions in the bill relate very much to what local authorities are to be encouraged to do.

Rather than suggesting that the disability sub-group or this committee does much at this stage, I would like to draw the committee's attention to the recent central research unit document, "Transport Provision for Disabled People in Scotland", which was made available in April of this year. The document set out to examine the prevalence of disability in Scotland, the transport needs of disabled people, the pattern of public transport in Scotland and the current gaps in provision. I would be surprised if it does not have almost everything that the Transport and the Environment Committee will need in relation to understanding what disabled people might require in a transport strategy. We should draw the attention of the Transport and the Environment Committee to the document, which it should study at some length. The document was consulted on fairly widely and I guess that it would have the support of most disabled organisations. It contains an enormous number of good recommendations and covers every aspect of transport, including ferries, buses, trains and cars.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): That is the document that I received when we discussed those issues.

The Convener: This committee does not have time to take any more evidence. I can write to the convener of the Transport and the Environment Committee, asking him to have regard to the document. We can do a trawl of the *Official Report* to pass on evidence that the committee has taken. It strikes me that some transport issues are specific to women or ethnic minorities. However, we do not have time to take evidence to feed into the lead committee.

Johann Lamont: We should ask the Transport and the Environment Committee to what extent it is taking evidence from groups other than mainstream transport experts. We can provide it with the *Official Reports* of our meetings. Some of

us have raised several issues, including the internal transport services that local authorities in my area must provide for people with disabilities of various kinds. I hope that the Transport and the Environment Committee will examine those matters. We should ask it to consider the balance of the oral evidence that it is taking. We should make it aware of the spread of expertise that it could use to ensure that the stage 1 report is balanced and draws on work that has already been done.

Malcolm Chisholm: That is why I asked my earlier question, even though it might have been a bit out of order. This is one area on which the equality unit has made some effort through the research that it has commissioned. In a sense, the timing is not ideal. Reid-Howie Associates are doing a good piece of work consulting women on these issues. Presumably the Transport and the Environment Committee knows about that work, but perhaps we should suggest that it examines it, given that it is not going to finalise its report until the end of the recess. That committee seems to be taking on board many of the concerns that we might have from a gender perspective, although that is complemented by what Johann Lamont has said—one of the traditional problems in transport is that it is even more male dominated than other sectors in terms of committees and so on.

Irene McGugan: In our letter to the Transport and the Environment Committee, we should indicate that we might wish to bring forward amendments at stage 2, depending on what that committee proposes in its stage 1 report.

The Convener: I will send a letter to the clerk to that committee and ensure that the convener sees it before the meeting tomorrow. That will mean that the committee has the information when it starts to take evidence.

Reporters

The Convener: The first report is from Irene McGugan.

Irene McGugan: Members should have, in the papers that were on their desks this morning, a document that I will refer to. Members may remember that the Disabled Persons Housing Service gave evidence to the committee on 29 February. Our sub-group examined that evidence and put together a list of questions that it would be useful to ask the appropriate ministers. We sent that provisional list back to the DPHS for its comments; the DPHS thought that the list comprehensively covered the material that it had submitted. It made only one amendment, which is contained in its letter, which can be found on the top sheet of members' papers. The other two pages are the same as the original document that the disability sub-group put together.

Members will notice that the inquiry is directed at three ministers, because there are overlaps in this area. There are questions for the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Transport and the Environment. The aim was to give committee members an opportunity to consider those questions and to comment on how representative they feel they are of the issues that were raised by the DPHS. If the document is approved as it stands, or with additions, letters including the questions will be sent to the three ministers for a response.

The Convener: Do members have any questions about that? When we come to consider the housing bill, would it be appropriate for us to review all the evidence that we have taken so far, decide whether there are other organisations from which we want to take evidence, and invite ministers before the committee to deal with the issues that are raised?

Irene McGugan: Yes.

The Convener: Although we are not dealing with the bill at the moment, we will do so at the appropriate time. We may be able to come back with a timetable for that before the recess, although it will depend on the Executive's timetable. It is unlikely that we will consider the bill until after the recess. Do members agree with those suggestions?

Members indicated agreement.

Irene McGugan: I have two other small points to raise. I draw members' attention to the appointment of Shona Simon as the Parliament's new equal opportunities development adviser. I am sure that she will have e-mailed all members.

It is her job to ensure that MSPs are aware of their responsibilities under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. For some time it has been on our agenda to find a means of making MSPs, both on this committee and more widely, aware of those responsibilities, particularly under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Initially Shona Simon was minded to hold two briefing sessions for MSPs. You will not be surprised to hear that she has since found out that it is difficult to get a large number of MSPs together for a briefing on anything. I wrote to her about that and she has agreed to put together written guidance on equal opportunities issues and the law. That may be available at some point in August. I suggest that that information be disseminated widely.

The Convener: It was very rude of me not to mention Shona Simon's appointment, as she has been present throughout the meeting. I should have introduced her to the committee at the start. I apologise for that.

Irene McGugan: Was that a fair summary of what has been decided, Shona?

Shona Simon (Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Officer): That was absolutely accurate.

Irene McGugan: I also want to draw attention to the fact that Railtrack has sent all MSPs its disability strategy, which may or may not be of interest.

Johann Lamont: The gender issues sub-group met last Tuesday and a written report will be circulated at a later stage. If I miss any of the points, we may be able to pick them up later.

The key issues that we discussed were those relating to stalking and vulnerable witnesses. Members will be aware that two weeks ago I attended a meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, which was considering a report on stalking and taking evidence on the cross-examination of witnesses in cases involving sexual crimes. I mentioned the fact that the Equal Opportunities Committee had been doing work on this issue for a long period and had taken some evidence, because members of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee were saying that they did not have enough time to do all the work.

It struck me that, first, we should be used as a resource more often, and secondly, when the work is being done, there should be a way of communicating that to other committees. It is possible that a great deal of work will have been done and evidence will have been taken on an issue, but at the next stage the wheel will have to be reinvented when another committee decides that it wants to investigate that issue.

Organisations that are under financial stress and do not have enough staff then have to come back to give evidence, as the evidence that has already been provided is not being used. Some streamlining work must be done on that, but we should also acknowledge that there is a place for hearing evidence other than in subject committees. The Equal Opportunities Committee would be an ideal resource for that.

Those were the main issues that were discussed, but others who attended may wish to comment. We felt that we would probably want to comment on the consultation document on stalking, but it might be necessary to do that at our next meeting. That would mean submitting our evidence late, but that would still be worth while. We discussed how to track all the consultation documents and agreed that it might be useful if the committee were at least notified about them when they are issued so that, if we wished to deal with any of them, we would be able to timetable in responses. Otherwise, we end up playing catch-up and letting things pass without making the impact that we should be making.

12:15

The Convener: Are there any questions or comments?

Malcolm Chisholm: We will consider the stalking document at our next meeting. Perhaps we could timetable a report to the committee on 4 July. We should tell the Scottish Executive justice department that we will put in a late submission.

The Convener: It will be difficult to fit in an item on 4 July, as we are asking Scottish Homes to give evidence to us then. We have only a two-hour slot for the meeting, and Jim Wallace will also give evidence—there will be a lot of questions for him.

Malcolm Chisholm: Is not Jim Wallace coming on Monday?

The Convener: Sorry—I meant that Jackie Baillie would come to the committee on 4 July. As I said, we just agreed to try to get Scottish Homes to come along on 4 July. Unless we are disciplined and focused—which we would also have to ask the witnesses to be—we will not have time to add to the agenda. The purpose of the meeting is to take evidence from Jackie Baillie.

Malcolm Chisholm: The alternative is that the sub-group comes up with something and does the usual business of e-mailing it round so that people can add comments. We could then formally approve it at the 4 July meeting.

The Convener: We could do that and use only 10 or 15 minutes of the meeting. That would be better, as people would have had a chance to consider the paper and to make amendments to it.

If necessary, we could use 10 minutes at the 4 July meeting to discuss the response. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We have a lot of items to squeeze in before the recess, and I suspect that people will not want to meet during the recess—although that would not particularly bother me. Perhaps we should discuss that as well at a future meeting.

The next report is from Michael McMahon.

Mr McMahon: As agreed at the previous meeting, I tried to hold a meeting last week to consider the issue that we debated with Positive Action in Housing. However, it was impossible to pull everyone together, which was probably no bad thing because, when I started to look at the Scottish Homes document, I realised how wide the consultation on it would have to be. Therefore, there would not have been much of a discussion last week, given the lack of information at that time.

I rescheduled the meeting for next Tuesday, by which time I will, I hope, have received responses. I invited a number of organisations to comment on the observations that I made and I hope that, by next Tuesday, I will have a report to put to the sub-group. I intend to produce that report before next Tuesday, so that I can e-mail all members with a draft. Therefore, those who come to the meeting on Tuesday morning—

Mr McGrigor: What time is the meeting?

Mr McMahon: It will be at 10 o'clock. We should be able to discuss the draft document in order to bring points back to the committee meeting on 4 July. The deadline for responses is 7 July, so we are still within the time scale. Given that Scottish Homes will be at the 4 July meeting, it should be possible to pull things together at that meeting.

We will also have a chance to pull together some of the information from our consultation with the Scottish Gypsy Travellers Association, which will be a longer-term piece of work. However, if we can start to pull together the information that we received, we can consider how to develop and progress that work.

Those are the two main items on next week's agenda on which I hope to be able to report on 4 July.

The Convener: We will consider our forward work programme next week; we might want to consider whether the work on the Scottish Gypsy Travellers Association should be one of the committee's major pieces of work. Perhaps we should commission some research or appoint an adviser.

Our final report is from Nora Radcliffe.

Nora Radcliffe: I e-mailed members with a note of the previous meeting. Our next meeting will be next Wednesday lunch time. The group has depended heavily on the Equality Network and Outright Scotland, but we hope to draw in more groups. We will vary the time of the meeting in order to attract more people. Next Wednesday, we will be bribing people with lunch, and we would be delighted to see any or all of the members of the committee.

Correspondence

The Convener: On the letter that we received from the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, I suggest that we question Jim Wallace about the petition on the Macpherson report that we discussed earlier.

That concludes our business. Thank you.

Meeting closed at 12:21.

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