

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 30 January 2001
(Morning)

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 30 January 2001

Col.

INTERESTS	987
HOUSING (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1	987
REPORTERS	1014

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

2nd Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Kate MacLean (Dundee West) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

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

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)

*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

*Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

*attended

WITNESSES

Jackie Baillie (Minister for Social Justice)

Mick Conboy (The Commission for Racial Equality)

Ms Margaret Curran (Deputy Minister for Social Justice)

Richard Grant (Scottish Executive Development Department)

Geoff Huggins (Scottish Executive Development Department)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lee Bridges

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Richard Walsh

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 30 January 2001

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:02*]

Interests

The Convener (Kate MacLean): Before we begin the meeting, I have to ask our new member, Margaret Smith, whether she has any interests to declare.

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I do not believe that I have any interests to declare.

The Convener: We agreed at the previous meeting that item 5 would be taken in private. Does the committee also agree to take items 2, 6 and 7 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

10:03

Meeting continued in private.

10:15

On resuming—

Housing (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Convener: I welcome Jackie Baillie, the Minister for Social Justice, Margaret Curran, the Deputy Minister for Social Justice, and Richard Grant and Geoff Huggins from the Scottish Executive. I extend a particularly warm welcome to Margaret Curran. This is the first time she has given evidence to this committee, and perhaps to any committee, so we will try to be nice to her.

The Minister for Social Justice (Jackie Baillie): But not to me.

The Convener: Obviously I speak only for myself and not for all members of the committee.

I thank Jackie Baillie for her prompt response to my letter. I realise that there were a lot of detailed questions in it and that there was not much time to answer them, so I am grateful.

I invite either Jackie Baillie or Margaret Curran to make a brief opening statement before we move on to questions.

Jackie Baillie: If I may abuse that invitation to

speak, I would like to begin by congratulating Kay Ullrich on what I believe is her 25th wedding anniversary.

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): How did you know that?

Jackie Baillie: The Scottish Executive knows everything.

Kay Ullrich: MI5 or MI6 is obviously working well.

Jackie Baillie: We are glad of the opportunity to discuss equality issues in the context of the Housing (Scotland) Bill, because housing and equality issues are both key areas of the social justice portfolio. As the convener said, we have submitted written replies to a list of questions. I hope that that will facilitate the committee's work when it considers its stage 1 report.

We believe that the Housing (Scotland) Bill demonstrates our commitment to mainstreaming and pushing forward equality of opportunity wherever possible. We do not claim to have got it exactly right, as housing is the first pilot area identified in the equality strategy, but we think that it represents a significant step forward.

The bill is intended to contribute to our objective of delivering better housing across all tenures and to help to ensure that a range of housing options is available to all, regardless of social, cultural or ethnic background, taking full account of those with special housing needs. The bill sits within the overarching framework provided by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and other legislation.

The Housing (Scotland) Bill's key provision is the requirement on local authorities to address equal opportunity needs within their area and to report on how that is being done through local housing strategies. The bill will enable a new single regulatory framework for all social rented housing, which will also provide the basis for improving standards and ensuring good practice, including good practice in relation to equal opportunities.

I shall run quickly through a number of the specific provisions in the bill. They include the right to register for everyone aged 16 or over and the introduction of new tenancy arrangements in the social rented sector, which provide a right to joint tenancies and to succession rights that recognise same-sex relationships and the position of children who are adopted or brought up as a member of the family. We have introduced new rights for carers, and tenancy and right-to-buy provisions that give disabled people the same rights as non-disabled people while retaining certain safeguards to help ensure that there is provision for disabled people in the future. We have also extended the

grounds for repossession due to anti-social behaviour specifically to include harassment.

What is really important for us is not so much what is in the bill, but how it is implemented and followed up. In particular, we are keen that the new executive agency should have a central role in regulating registered social landlords and local authorities and in monitoring, preparing and implementing local housing strategies, to ensure that implementation is robust. We will work with a range of external bodies to ensure that we get the implementation framework right. Officials have already begun that process in discussion with the statutory equality bodies and we are happy to keep the committee apprised of progress if that is desirable.

We are happy to expand on any of the general principles or specific issues.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): You said that there will be a new single regulatory framework for all social rented housing. We know that the bill makes an exception of co-operatives, as defined by the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. We asked about that in our letter and you replied that the Executive is currently in discussion with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations about the scope for bringing tenants of fully mutual co-ops into the secure tenancy. How are those discussions going?

Jackie Baillie: Let me first describe the situation with regard to fully mutual co-ops, before asking the officials who are dealing with those discussions to answer that question. As members will appreciate, fully mutual co-ops require the tenants to be members and the members to be tenants. That creates a difficulty in absorbing them directly into the Scottish secure tenancy. Having said that, the co-ops, by and large, operate to model occupancy agreements designed by the SFHA. We are considering lodging an amendment that would allow us to extend the package of new and more robust rights to fully mutual co-ops. I shall ask Richard Grant to tell members what stage the discussions are at.

Richard Grant (Scottish Executive Development Department): At the end of October, we had a meeting with representatives from most of the co-ops and from the SFHA. It was agreed in principle that it would be a good idea to try to include fully mutual co-ops within the framework of the tenancy, and the SFHA went away to consider in more detail its ideas for doing that. The SFHA promised that it would come back to me by the end of this month, so I am expecting a response fairly soon.

The areas in which I think there may need to be modification relate to questions about sub-letting, assignment of tenancies and succession. There

may also need to be some amendment of the repossession elements of the bill. All those changes would be designed to ensure that the co-ops can continue to be co-ops of which all their tenants are members. I do not think that that should be too difficult, but we shall wait to see what happens when the SFHA gets back to us.

Linda Fabiani: How many tenants are likely to be affected? How many tenants are members of fully mutual co-operatives?

Richard Grant: I think that there are about 20 co-ops, all of which are relatively small, but I do not have the figure to hand.

Linda Fabiani: Will the right to buy be given to tenants of fully mutual co-ops?

Jackie Baillie: The tenants are members and the members collectively own the property, so they would be exempt from the right to buy because, in effect, they have it already.

Linda Fabiani: So we are unable to have a single social tenancy and there is no need for the right to buy to be extended to justify the single social tenancy.

Jackie Baillie: If you go back to the point about fully mutual co-ops being a very specific category, whose position impacts on a small number of people who have always been outwith the conventional tenancy arrangements—whether the former assured tenancy or the secure tenancy—the attempt to link the two is perhaps stretching things slightly.

Linda Fabiani: I would not say so. We all heard the previous minister with responsibility for housing's justification that the right to buy had to be extended so that we could have a single social tenancy across all social tenancies in Scotland. We now do not have that.

The Convener: Linda, we are meant to ask questions that relate particularly to equal opportunities issues.

Linda Fabiani: I am asking about equality of opportunity for tenants. The right to buy may be extended, but all tenants are not being given the same rights.

The Convener: I will allow you to pursue this line of questioning a bit further but the equality of opportunity that you speak of does not fall within the remit of this committee. I would not like the whole session—we have an hour—to be taken up with issues that would be more appropriately addressed by the Social Justice Committee.

Linda Fabiani: I will ask one other question on the right to buy and will return to my other questions later.

How many categories of tenants with the right to

buy will there be if the bill is passed? There will be tenants with the current right to buy, tenants with a new right to buy that is active, and tenants with a new right to buy that is suspended due to pressured area status. That would work against equality of opportunity.

Jackie Baillie: We are clear that we need to make the new and modernised right to buy more strategic. That is why we have produced a range of measures to ensure that there are safeguards. It is essential that there is equality of opportunity to access social rented housing as well as an ability to exercise the right to buy. I think that Linda Fabiani would agree with that.

We have said that we recognise that in rural areas, and in some urban areas, there are pressures. We need the facility to designate pressured areas so that the right to buy can become a more strategic tool. Equally, we have said that we want to reduce discounts and lengthen the time before which somebody is eligible for a discount. We have also proposed a number of related measures, such as the 10-year exemption that can be given to housing associations whose financial viability has been adversely affected, with an option to extend if necessary. That package delivers the right to buy in a far more strategic way than has been the case previously.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): My question concerns provision for the victims of harassment. Will the guidelines on equality of opportunity include a duty to put in place adequate funding, mechanisms and procedures for target-hardening measures, such as rapid response property repairs for the victims of harassment and things such as fireproof letterboxes?

Jackie Baillie: We are keen that the Housing (Scotland) Bill should make explicit our commitment to dealing with all forms of harassment, including racial harassment. We have made an explicit commitment in the section on anti-social behaviour. As members will appreciate, local authorities already have powers to fund things such as voluntary sector organisations or, indeed, rapid response teams, if they choose to set them up. Our preference is to leave local authorities to determine what they want to fund based on the needs of their local area. We will, however, provide guidance on how to deal with harassment, which will address some of the useful points that Jamie McGrigor made.

Geoff Huggins can contribute some extra detail.

Mr McGrigor: Would the guidelines introduce a duty to provide such things?

Jackie Baillie: Although we could go round placing duties on local authorities, we want to

ensure that the services that they provide on the ground are suitable for the needs of their areas. In reality, it is much better to approach that through guidance. Equally, the new executive agency will have a monitoring and regulation function, and a duty to examine the local housing strategy, part of which will be the housing management function, and, indeed, the homelessness strategy.

Mr McGrigor: What provisions are there in the bill to ensure that equal opportunities are taken seriously from day one? What provisions exist for monitoring the performance of local authorities and registered social landlords in dealing with vulnerable groups?

Jackie Baillie: As I mentioned briefly, Scottish Homes will become a new executive agency, directly responsible to Scottish ministers. Our intention, in the bill and in the framework that we will lay down for the new executive agency's operation, is that part of the agency's remit will be to monitor all the strategies, including the local housing strategies, the housing management function and homelessness strategies.

A key part of that will be ensuring that the new executive agency has regard to equal opportunities and that the guidance is being implemented. The review will be of both policy and practice. Equally, we will want to assemble relevant data sets, such as the Scottish household survey, the Scottish house condition survey and the census, so that we can measure change over time. The executive agency will have a monitoring role from day one.

10:30

Mr McGrigor: What remedial action, if any, will be taken if local authorities or registered social landlords are deemed not to be carrying out their duty to promote equal opportunities?

Jackie Baillie: Our view is that the executive agency will provide support and guidance, but it will also have a regulatory function. It will have recourse to powers to ensure that local authorities conform. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 place specific requirements on public bodies. The executive agency will also control development funding, with the agreement of Scottish ministers, which will be applied to local housing strategies to meet national priorities and objectives that include equality.

Kay Ullrich: In the absence of a statutory duty on landlords to follow the guidelines, are you absolutely sure that guidance that will be issued by ministers will be effective?

Jackie Baillie: There is always a tension between whether to create statute or to write guidance. Particularly on questions of equality,

people need to feel a sense of ownership and in many organisations quite deep-rooted cultural change is needed. The best way to do that is through partnership. The guidance that we will issue will be developed in consultation with the key equality interests and its implementation will be monitored by the executive agency. We are convinced that the executive agency's monitoring and regulation role will ensure that the guidance is complied with.

Linda Fabiani: You may find this a strange stance for me to take, but my question is about equality for landlords. Why—in the sanctions that are available to the Scottish Executive if it felt that landlords were not performing their functions properly—is there a difference between a local authority and other landlords?

Jackie Baillie: Equality for landlords is an interesting concept. We felt that it was important to recognise that councils, as landlords, have a layer of democratic accountability that is not present in housing associations and other landlords.

Linda Fabiani: That is debatable.

Jackie Baillie: Councillors are elected by the public, if by a different system, just as MSPs are. That makes them as accountable as we are. The arrangements must be robust, but sensitive to that difference of accountability.

Linda Fabiani: The bill says that when a remedial plan is put in place the Executive "may" monitor its implementation. That is very loose—it should perhaps say that the local authority "should be" monitored, to ensure that the guidance is complied with.

Jackie Baillie: That is probably a question about drafting. Our intention is to monitor the implementation of such plans. Monitoring RSLs and local authorities in respect of all their functions will be a responsibility of the executive agency.

Cathy Peattie: Will the criteria for monitoring be laid down and will the executive agency involve tenants in monitoring? It can be easy to monitor things on paper or to visit only local authorities, while not speaking to tenants or their organisations.

Jackie Baillie: The monitoring role and the relevant criteria will be laid out in the framework document for the new executive agency, which will state clearly the commitment to equality of opportunity both in the agency's management and its executive functions. Additionally, each piece of guidance that supports aspects of the legislation will contain the commitment to equality of opportunity. We need to ensure that monitoring is not just about implementation of policy, but that it includes measurement of data over time. I take your point that doing more than monitoring

information on paper could be useful. We will look at that.

Geoff Huggins (Scottish Executive): Involving and consulting tenants as part of the examination of housing associations is part of Scottish Homes' current practice and we expect that to continue. Scottish Homes also carries out regular table-top exercises to identify financial or other issues that may have arisen.

Cathy Peattie: It is important to continue that and that a stakeholder approach is taken to monitoring.

Geoff Huggins: At the moment we have a group working with Scottish Homes, the SFHA and local authorities to develop guidance on that, which will be published. Equality groups are involved in the preparation of the guidance. By the time the guidance comes out, it will be apparent that it has been equality-proofed.

Mrs Smith: I want to return to consultation. The bill provides for a statutory duty on local authorities and registered social landlords to consult tenants and organisations that represent tenants. Sometimes such consultation is easier in a geographic area. A group of tenants can be identified in a particular area. What plans—if any—are there to require local authorities and registered social landlords to consult equality groups? On Cathy Peattie's point, what guidance will the Executive give on how to carry out effective and meaningful continuing consultation?

Jackie Baillie: As we develop guidance and take matters forward, we intend to consult equality interests beyond statutory requirements. We are loth to impose a duty to consult the statutory equality interests because those interests have told us that they would be swamped by consultation processes that might not be entirely appropriate to them.

We are saying, however, that landlords will have to produce a strategy for tenant participation and that we will provide guidance on the form and nature of that strategy. Specifically, there will be guidance on how vulnerable groups will be engaged in the process of tenant participation. The regulator will monitor to ensure that that happens. The bill also requires landlords to consult tenants individually in certain circumstances.

In addition, the landlord will register groups using specified criteria and those groups will be consulted. The criteria will be set nationally to ensure that vulnerable people are not left out of the equation. Richard Grant will answer the question in more detail.

Richard Grant: The bill imposes duties for consultation in a number of places and for different

purposes. The references to consultation in relation to tenant participation and consultation are very specific. Those references relate to day-to-day management and will involve tenants in that process. The bill also refers to consultation in the development of local housing strategies and the issuing of guidance on such consultation. Clearly, we expect local authorities to consult not only tenants' groups, but much more widely than that. The bill also refers to consultation in the development of guidance—we have discussed that. A much wider framework of consultation will be required in that case.

Mrs Smith: I would like to pick up on a completely separate issue. I have been through the community care inquiry with the Health and Community Care Committee and one of the things that came out of our inquiry was the important role that housing policy plays in keeping people in their homes and communities. A range of people are affected—not only the elderly, but people with disabilities and so on. We must consider not only letting people stay in their own homes, but giving them the ability to come and go to their friends' homes and their family's homes. I am keen to know what the Executive is doing to increase the provision of barrier-free housing. What will the Housing (Scotland) Bill do to increase that provision? What is the long-term plan for barrier-free housing?

The minister spoke about the need for safeguards in stock that has been altered to make it more accessible to people with disabilities. How are we making progress with the strategy for that? Are we making progress?

Jackie Baillie: A number of questions were wrapped up in that. Let me deal with them in turn.

As members may be aware, Scottish Homes now builds all its homes to barrier-free standards. When it converts to the new executive agency, our intention is to continue that practice. As development funding transfers, as it will do over time, from the executive agency to local authorities and their partners, we will be keen to ensure that housing that has been built with that development funding still conforms to barrier-free standards. The policy will continue—from Scottish Homes, through to the executive agency, through to the arrangements when development funding is transferred.

Last year in the Parliament, changes were introduced to building regulations. Those changes provide for visitability standards throughout all new-build housing—whether in the public or private sectors. The issue is kept under review and equality interests are taken into account. The intention is to move to barrier-free housing as soon as is practicable. The next step after ensuring visitability is to ensure that houses are

barrier-free.

A lot of existing housing for disabled people has either been specially built for them or adapted. We are keen to ensure that that housing remains available to disabled people, but we recognise that if there is a joint tenant, or if a partner or spouse is involved, such people should have the right to succession to the property. It is perfectly reasonable that they should have that right. However, local authorities can provide alternative accommodation, thus freeing the house for the use of a disabled person. We have tried to build in safeguards to ensure that the stock of housing for disabled people is preserved.

Apart from the fact that all their housing is barrier-free, Scottish Homes and local housing associations are increasingly creating housing that is specifically designed for disabled people who have particular needs. That has been a trend among certain local housing associations over the past few years.

The Convener: Kay Ullrich had a specific question on building standards; it was answered, I think, in the submission.

Kay Ullrich: Yes, the question was about housing for the disabled and the minister has answered it. I welcome the grant support for the installation of smoke detectors, main-door entry phones, and so on, but I am disappointed by the response on the installation of sprinkler systems, both in housing that is already occupied by disabled people and in new-build housing for disabled people. All the evidence suggests that sprinklers save lives. Disabled people, by the very nature of their situation, are not good at running out of houses when there is a fire.

Jackie Baillie: That is quite a technical issue, so I will ask Geoff Huggins to deal with it.

Geoff Huggins: We are examining sprinkler systems and doing some further research with colleagues who deal with fire brigades. Although we know that sprinkler systems work, their use raises issues about how they are set up and activated; and how people interact with them. We are trying to identify beneficial ways of putting them in place. The experience elsewhere has been that people turn them off because they are too easily activated or because they work inappropriately or simply that they are not used, despite being installed. We are examining some of those practicalities and funding research on that.

10:45

Kay Ullrich: So the answer is not no, but maybe.

Geoff Huggins: Well—

Kay Ullrich: Or definitely maybe.

Jackie Baillie: Let us investigate the matter, Kay. There are issues of suitability and cost, as Geoff Huggins said. You could say that the answer is maybe—I will respond to Kay Ullrich first to tell her what our intentions are in this area.

Kay Ullrich: Thank you, minister.

Geoff Huggins: The buildings side of the office will also launch a consultation in the summer on building regulations and building law more generally. It will consider new build, as it does on an on-going and regular basis, and refurbishment. Members might want to make representations on that.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I want to go back to the points that Jamie McGrigor and other members made before we talked about barrier-free housing. Evidence suggests that there is a genuine need for equal opportunities training to enable relevant local authority staff and registered social landlords to deal sensitively and effectively with members of vulnerable groups. I note that, in your response to the committee, you state that the training of local authority staff is a matter for local authorities. What mechanisms, if any, are intended to ensure that local authorities' and registered social landlords' staff have appropriate training and understanding of the issues to ensure good practice?

Jackie Baillie: We cannot put in training systems to cover every single agency, nor would it be appropriate to do so. However, through the overarching equality strategy that was passed by Parliament, we can make an impact across the Executive. Our intention is to make a wider impact on local government with the best-value framework that is in place. Over and above that, the guidance that will underpin the Housing (Scotland) Bill will make explicit reference to the need to promote and recognise equality of opportunity. Implicit in that is the need to ensure that staff are sensitive to the issues, that they have a clear understanding of the issues and, in some cases, that they challenge the traditional beliefs that prevail in many local authorities.

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): You know from experience that the committee is keen on monitoring issues and you have expanded on that quite a bit. You have said that there will be monitoring, and consultation on the monitoring, but will there be a statutory duty to report annually on monitoring to provide evidence of what monitoring is being conducted?

Jackie Baillie: There will not be a specific statutory duty to report on monitoring. There is already a requirement on Scottish ministers to report annually to Parliament on the overall equality strategy. That will draw on specific reports

from every area of the Executive, including housing. I am keen to take some of the statistics that the new executive agency and others will have on registered social landlords and local authorities to see if we can produce a national statistical publication that is based on that information.

However, members will have access to ministers, who will report to Parliament with details of all housing matters, including the work of the executive agency. I hope that members are comforted that they will still be able to grill ministers.

Mr McMahon: I will continue to grill and give the deputy minister a chance to score on her debut. The ministers will know that the Equal Opportunities Committee is investigating issues that involve travelling people. At present, travelling people have only missives of let. Could one of the bill's objectives be to extend the right of secure tenancy to travelling people to improve their situation, or are there practical problems that exclude that possibility?

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): Was that a direct invitation to me? Thank you. That is very kind of you.

I thank the convener for her kind introduction. I appreciate the work that the committee has done on travelling people. It is to the committee's credit that it is considering such a neglected target group of the population. I am not sure whether the travelling community is asking for such an extension to its rights. We have worked with the communities and we followed the advisory committee's recommendations. We are urging local authorities, health bodies and other organisations to implement those recommendations. However, I am not sure whether such an extension would be appropriate.

Mr McMahon: I do not think that the travelling people are making a firm demand for such an extension, but questions have been raised about rules on tenancies that apply to travellers' sites. Will the bill take that issue into consideration?

Ms Curran: Yes. We plan to introduce regulation and monitoring of travellers' sites and their management through the local housing strategies.

Richard Grant: Travellers live in many forms of housing. If they moved into local authority registered social landlord housing permanently or temporarily, a short secure tenancy or a full Scottish secure tenancy might be relevant. However, the normal arrangement is for travellers to have their own caravan, mobile home or other form of housing, which they will park on a site for a while. Therefore, a conventional tenancy, as set out in the Housing (Scotland) Bill, is not

appropriate. Something rather different is required.

Jackie Baillie: A duty will be placed on local authorities to manage sites—we have picked up the fact that there are clear differences between sites and between the services that are available on them. The new executive agency will monitor the implementation of that duty.

Mr McMahon: Can I chance my arm and ask one more question? At present, it is not inconceivable that somebody who lives in one local authority area could be the perpetrator of harassment of somebody who lives in another local authority area, or that somebody could be the victim of such harassment. Will the bill provide mechanisms to force registered social landlords to deal with such difficulties?

Jackie Baillie: I will ask one of the officials to comment on the technical detail. On the point of principle, I think that the issue concerns not the geographical situation but the harassment that is experienced. Local authorities have boundaries that might run down a street on which the victim lives on one side and the perpetrator lives on the other, so the point that Michael McMahon makes is valid. If the bill does not deal with that, we will be keen to ensure that a local authority—in whose area a perpetrator lives or in whose area a victim or the registered social landlord lives—could take action. We are keen that all avenues should be covered.

Richard Grant: The bill gives landlords powers to seek repossession following harassment. A landlord who took up cudgels on behalf of a victim could approach the local authority or the other RSL to seek action. The bill's provisions on harassment are only part of the overall framework of available legal and non-legal remedies, such as anti-social behaviour orders, non-harassment orders, interdicts and so on. It is for the landlord to go to the local authority in the area in which the harasser is located to try to get some kind of resolution to the problem.

The Convener: We probably have another five minutes for questions.

In response to Margaret Smith's first question, the minister seemed to answer that equality groups do not want a statutory duty of consultation placed on local authorities and RSLs. I think that the minister said that equality organisations felt that they would be swamped if such a duty were placed on local authorities.

Which equality groups said that they did not want that duty to be imposed? Has consideration been given to the provision of additional resources to organisations that are already funded by the Scottish Executive, to allow them to participate in consultations? Could specific funding be given to organisations that are not funded by the Scottish

Executive to allow them to respond to Executive consultations?

Jackie Baillie: I ask Geoff Huggins to answer the first part of that question.

Geoff Huggins: When we met the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Rights Commission last week, we discussed whether they wished to be consulted on the wide range of guidance that is being developed both by the Scottish Executive and by Scottish Homes and which will be required, in practice, by housing associations. Those organisations' view was that they wanted to be consulted and involved as appropriate. They did not say that they did not want local authorities to have a statutory duty to consult; their view was that they did not want a blanket statutory duty, simply because such a duty would involve them in a lot of issues in which they are not interested.

Their key target was that the headline guidance on overarching duties should be fully mainstreamed for equality as part of the process. That guidance would then trickle down and cascade through everything else that housing associations and local authorities did. It would be wrong to say that those organisations did not want any involvement, but they did not want to be sucked automatically or tokenistically into consultation because of a piece of paper that lands on somebody's desk. That is a proportionate, sensible response.

The Convener: Having a statutory duty to be consulted does not necessarily mean that one has a statutory duty to respond to the consultation. If equality organisations were to be consulted in the same way as tenants' organisations are, they could choose which consultation documents to respond to.

Ms Curran: I understand your argument, convener. Members of the committee will agree that we must get away from the tick-box equality that some of us have experienced.

Consultation could be defined as sending a copy of an annual report to a head office. We do not want to do that—we are taking a different approach by embedding equality practice into everything that we do. That goes much further than consultation—it is about understanding the ethos of organisations. Imagine—the CRE and the Disability Rights Commission are involved with our practice and will be involved, in some detail, with housing agencies throughout Scotland. That is the model that we are going for, rather than simply imposing a statutory duty to consult. We all know that organisations that are under pressure use tick-box consultation—that is what our discussions are about. We want to move towards a situation in which equality becomes the norm—the everyday

practice—for all housing agencies.

Jackie Baillie: I will outline the three strands to our approach. When local authorities draw up their housing strategies, they must follow a partnership process, taking account of the needs of the different groups in their area. That will be explicit in the guidance that will be produced for them.

Local authorities will have a statutory duty to publish their local housing strategies. At that point comment can, naturally, be invited from a range of interests beyond the statutory equality agencies, to include people who have concerns about sexual orientation, religion, age and so on. We will ensure that the regulator—the new executive agency—in its monitoring role is aware of the content of the local housing strategies. We are prepared to conduct dialogue with equality agencies on the most helpful way of doing that, rather than introducing a blanket statutory duty to consult.

Resources were mentioned—an issue that is dear to everybody's heart. Members will appreciate that we have resourced the tenant participation process with an additional £4 million—an official will correct me if I am wrong. We are unable to resource everybody who responds to consultation. The committee has addressed that difficult issue before. We rely on a number of agencies that want to shape Government policy so that they can ultimately get better delivery. All the statutory equality agencies are funded on a UK basis to advise Government on its approach to certain issues in relation to race, disability or gender.

11:00

Kay Ullrich: We have heard evidence that more lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people live in private tenancies than in social tenancies. How would you react if I said that, because of that, the bill in effect discriminates against same-sex couples by not dealing with private tenancies?

Jackie Baillie: We have been clear from the start that the bill is predominantly concerned with issues in the social rented sector. We acknowledged that there are disparate pieces of work on the private sector that need some thought and need to be pulled together. We announced the establishment of the housing improvement task force, which will address a number of issues in relation to the private sector. I have made a commitment to return to the matter. The legislation that governs private tenancies is contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988. That act introduced measures to lift the private rented sector, which was then in decline. As a consequence, such tenancies are governed by contractual arrangements rather than by statute. We did not think that sufficient thinking had been done to pull

the whole thing together for this bill.

Kay Ullrich: So you will acknowledge that the nature of much of the private rented sector is that it includes many vulnerable groups.

Jackie Baillie: That is the nature of the private rented sector and the socially rented sector.

Kay Ullrich: We cannot, however, forget the private sector and the fact that so many people who have needs live in that sector.

Jackie Baillie: We recognise that the majority of people in the rented sector—both private and rented—have needs that we wish to address. I have made a clear commitment to return to the issue of private sector housing in general after the bill is enacted.

The Convener: I intend to finish this part of the meeting in 10 minutes. Three members have indicated that they wish to ask questions. Questions and answers should be brief.

Linda Fabiani: I do not think that anyone could disagree with the statements that the minister made about having a range of housing opportunities open to all and the opportunity for everyone to enter socially rented housing. In the original proposals that were produced for consultation a year and a half ago, there was a commitment to Scottish Homes funding for areas where socially rented housing had fallen below a certain level—10 per cent or 5 per cent. That would be in the interests of balanced communities. The new programme for Government document says merely that the Executive will

“attract large scale new investment into rented homes”.

Is there still a commitment to funding—through the executive agency or councils—socially rented housing in areas where the number of such houses has fallen below the level at which people have equality of opportunity to enter socially rented housing, and at which communities are clearly no longer balanced?

Jackie Baillie: We have been clear that our policy objective is to create mixed and balanced communities, whether they are in urban or rural areas. The development funding that is assigned annually, with the approval of Scottish ministers, will reflect that balance throughout Scotland. Given Linda Fabiani's interest in the right to buy, she will be aware that the designation of pressured areas is partly to enable local planners to come together to try to resolve structural problems in an area, such as the lack of social rented housing. Our policy direction is still very much to create mixed and sustainable communities.

Mr McMahon: Evidence that was given to the committee by Scottish Homes—following requests

from organisations such as Positive Action in Housing and PATH Scotland—shows that there is a desire for a commitment by Scottish Homes to encourage development of ethnic minority housing associations, where that need is identified. Do you have a view on that?

Ms Curran: There is an argument in principle for developing black-led housing associations, but we do not want to say where and how that should be done. We will discuss that further with key organisations to ensure that we provide appropriately for ethnic minority communities, which we are committed to doing.

Elaine Smith: If the previous address of a woman who is fleeing domestic violence was in one local authority area and she presents as homeless in another local authority area, will there be provision in the bill to ensure that the second local authority does not send the woman back to her original local authority? I worked as a homelessness officer some years ago and I know that that can sometimes happen. Women who are fleeing domestic violence might often wish to be nearer to family and friends as well as to be away from their original area.

Secondly, as the gender reporter to the committee, I attended the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's meeting on 29 November, at which evidence was being given on the Housing (Scotland) Bill by women's groups. I asked Scottish Women's Aid,

"Given that councils have statutory responsibility for homelessness, do you see stock transfer having an impact on women fleeing domestic violence?"

That organisation's answer was,

"If stock transfer goes ahead and Women's Aid groups have to deal with several landlords who do not have a statutory responsibility to rehouse homeless individuals—they just negotiate with the local authority—there might be further difficulties in getting women rehoused."—[*Official Report, Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee*, 29 November 2000; c 1613.]

I am worried about that.

Jackie Baillie: The current code of guidance on homelessness takes specific account of women and men who are fleeing abusive relationships and of the need to ensure that a victim is not placed in a house close to where the problem occurred. However, we ask local authorities for their homelessness strategies and we intend that specific account will be taken of circumstances that arise as a consequence of domestic violence. Those issues can also apply to harassment and other forms of violence. As housing officials make decisions, they must be sensitive to the consequences of any allocation. I hope that that reassures Elaine Smith.

Scottish Women's Aid fears that there will have

to be negotiations with several registered social landlords after a stock transfer but, as I understand it, that will not be the case. The local authorities will retain the responsibility for dealing with homelessness in their areas. A homeless person's first port of call will therefore be the local authority. It will be up to that authority, through a process of nomination and discussion with the registered social landlords in the area, to find an appropriate housing solution. Margaret Curran is more of a specialist on community ownership than I am.

Ms Curran: I am glad that we are getting close to the end of this session.

I know that Elaine Smith has a strong interest in this subject, and that the committee will be concerned about the rights of women in these situations. Since I took up my post, I have been keen to ensure that the right messages of reassurance are being given to key organisations.

I have no doubt that community ownership will empower women, rather than limit their rights. We have been assured that regulation, monitoring and arbitration will guarantee the rights of women—many women's organisations have been calling for the arbitration and regulation that we are now delivering. The proposals in the bill will lead the many women who are involved in housing associations throughout the country into decision-making positions, which will do much to protect women's rights.

Elaine Smith: There are only a few situations in which women will be housed by housing associations. I accept what the minister says about local authorities being approached first, but we cannot get away from the fact that attitudes persist about women's aid refuges and women who are fleeing domestic violence.

Margaret Curran mentioned arbitration. Will the tenants have any input to that process, or will it involve only the council, other registered social landlords and whoever is arbitrating? The problem with arbitration is that it takes time, although women might be in a tenuous housing position.

Ms Curran: We have all worked to try to change attitudes, but I accept Elaine Smith's point about housing associations. The bill will help to improve matters. We all share a responsibility for those kinds of social issues, and housing associations and others will be required to house people appropriately, which is why the system of regulation and monitoring is being brought in. In the past, that was left to the good will of a sympathetic housing officer or manager, but it will not be left to good will any more—it will be required by legislation.

I take Elaine Smith's point about the need for speedy arbitration. That is something that I am

considering at the moment. We need to put in place mechanisms for dealing with certain situations and to ensure that everybody fulfils their responsibilities. We are beginning to break down barriers regarding issues of domestic violence, but we must continue to press for progress. I will be happy to return to the committee with details of the way in which arbitration will operate in future.

Jackie Baillie: I can confirm that, in the interests of natural justice, there will be a personal input from the tenant who is concerned during the arbitration process.

The Convener: If any members have more detailed questions on specific issues that have been discussed today, they can get in touch with the minister.

I thank the ministers for coming along today. I hope that the experience was not too horrible for you, Margaret.

Ms Curran: I used to think that committee members had a difficult time.

Jackie Baillie: Thank you very much.

The Convener: The next evidence will be from the Commission for Racial Equality. The agenda states that Levi Pay will give evidence, but Mick Conboy is here in his stead. Members have received a paper that has not been submitted officially yet, but which will be submitted officially in the next couple of days. Mick will speak to the paper anyway and answer our questions.

Mick Conboy (The Commission for Racial Equality): I thank the committee for inviting the CRE talk to it today. We have not yet produced an official response to the bill although, since the Parliament's Christmas recess, we have been in discussion with officials. We have examined the bill's proposals in light of the six key recommendations that we made. Committee members ought to have received a copy of our submission that dealt with the green paper and our initial thoughts on the bill. That is the current state of play. This morning, I will give the committee a quick run through our response to the bill, after which I will be happy to deal with members' questions.

11:15

Our first recommendation was on the statutory right to register on a housing list. We strongly supported the Executive's intention on that and are pleased that that right will be introduced in section 7 of the bill. However, on this and other matters, we would like more clarification of what the bill proposes. In other areas, we want to see greater boldness on the part of the Executive and the Scottish Parliament in making amendments to the bill. The statutory right to register on a housing

list is important, but we would also like the way in which people can access that right to be clarified, as well as—more important—the ways in which people will be made aware of that right. The committee will be aware of the right to live free from harassment as it is set out in the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. Members will also know that there are questions about how much of a reality that is.

We have recommended that ministers should have placed on them a duty to work towards the improvement of the quality of housing. We saw an amendment along those lines in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Bill, which was recently enacted. We think that any minister would want to improve the area that their portfolio covers. The placing of such a duty on a minister would be particularly important in the housing sector, especially given the fact that information that we have about ethnic minority communities in Scotland suggests that the overcrowded conditions and the poor quality of the housing that many such people live in would improve greatly if there were a general duty on ministers to improve the quality of the housing stock.

We support the move towards a single regulatory framework. We know that consultation is going on in relation to the development of equality performance indicators, which will be essential to that development. Although we appreciate that it might change, we are slightly disappointed that the draft code for the new regulator does not appear to take account of equal opportunity issues. In our response to the green paper, we said that any regulatory framework should at least be equal to our code of practice in rented housing, which is being overtaken by events in Westminster following the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

The bill refers to powers that the agency will have in relation to the ability to inspect individual registered social landlords. Having finished our involvement with the recent thematic inspection of police forces in Scotland that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary conducted, we understand the huge benefits from having the ability to conduct thematic inspections. We are awaiting further clarification on whether that ability will be set out in the legislation.

There has been great discussion about consultation. From the CRE's point of view, one of the key elements is not necessarily whether statutory agencies are involved in consultation—although we have a clear and important role to play. Past experience shows that the majority of consultation with tenants and tenants groups has taken place with established groups, which do not necessarily reflect the needs, experiences and aspirations of ethnic minority communities. We

seek something in the bill or the guidance to clarify the expectations that will be placed on registered social landlords to consult—and to demonstrate consultation of—a wider community.

We are delighted that the Executive has accepted the recommendation to make equal opportunities a compulsory element of housing strategies. We are a little concerned that there is a parallel with the Standards in Scotland Schools etc Act 2000. At the time, there was an indication that guidance would follow on from that act, but we are now led to believe that that will not happen. The role of guidance is crucial in supporting legislation and in ensuring that it is put into effect and that the intentions of Parliament are carried out. We are somewhat concerned by the suggestion that the guidance will cover all the bases. Given what happened to the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, we are yet to be convinced.

We welcome the provision for defining racial and other forms of harassment as grounds for eviction. However, in light of the experience of participation in the HMI thematic inspection of police forces, we know that a crucial aspect of the police angle is the multiagency approach to tackling racial harassment locally. The inspectorate was able to highlight the areas where that local connection was breaking down. The police were keen and were making efforts, but there was no equivalent contribution from local partners. HMI was unable to spell out in its report what a multiagency approach might look like and there is a feeling that it is a difficult issue. However, if there is not at least a broad framework that local partners can buy into, we are likely to find that local partnership working will not take off, because everybody will be looking the other way and expecting other partners to take action.

Those are the CRE's initial responses to the bill and some of our recommendations. We will provide the committee with a more coherent response presently. I will be happy to answer questions.

The Convener: Thank you.

Mr McMahon: The ministers talked about provisions for effective monitoring. Do you believe that those provisions need to be strengthened?

Mick Conboy: The CRE has yet to see the detail. There are references to the Scottish household survey and the census and, although they are important data that will provide a wealth of information when the exercises have been completed, the type of monitoring that we recommend would be more detailed and local, particularly in terms of the extent of provision for individuals and communities. For example, without closer monitoring of data on allocation policies, we will never be able to unravel the difficulties that

surround access for ethnic minority communities to appropriate housing, because we will not know whether there is an inherent barrier in those policies.

Mr McMahon: Is there anything that the CRE would include in the bill to ensure that we do not miss any opportunity to cover equal opportunities as best we can?

Mick Conboy: I have to say, "So far, so good." However, we await some clarification on specific recommendations that we made during the consultation exercise. Some other details also require clarification. For example, if the issue is to be picked up in guidance, how will that guidance be framed and how will measures be implemented and monitored? Monitoring will be crucial. However, I draw again the parallel with HMI constabulary's inspection process, which was clearly an opportunity to find out what had been done on specific guidance from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland. We need an equivalent inspection process to monitor precise activity and outcome and, more important, to make recommendations for future action.

Mrs Smith: When the minister gave evidence earlier, we asked her about the bill's placing of a statutory duty on local authorities and RSLs to consult with tenants and tenants organisation. The minister replied that equalities groups did not necessarily want to be consulted on every aspect of the bill. Are you concerned by those comments, or does the minister's suggestion provide a more appropriate way forward than a blanket statutory duty to consult?

Mick Conboy: Although the CRE is a small organisation, we must deal with a wealth of information that emerges from various Executive departments and we must deal with many other organisations that seek our advice and assistance.

Mrs Smith: We know how you feel.

Mick Conboy: That said, we are not concerned about our ability to respond; as the convener pointed out, we have every opportunity to say, "No, we can't do it". However, it is important that we have the opportunity to contribute. We are not as concerned about what happens at our level as we are about how individual landlords will ensure a far wider consultation with tenants than exists at the moment.

Mrs Smith: In that case, it is reasonable for organisations to send to the CRE their annual reports or their latest glossy brochures, after which you will decide how—or whether—you will respond. However, there is a different raft of considerations nearer to ground level. For example, staff who are involved in consultations with local equality groups and so on must be trained to ensure that they get information to

people and that they can consult them meaningfully, rather than simply sending them a glossy brochure and leaving it at that.

Mick Conboy: Yes. To be honest, I would not be happy about receiving an annual report from every housing organisation in the country and then having to offer guidance. We would prefer to liaise with the Executive on the development of guidance at that level.

It is crucial for organisations to consider how they consult, as well as whom. The same glossy booklet that might be appropriate for a professional organisation involved in the consultation might not be appropriate for an individual tenant. We must bear in mind a series of factors, given that that individual tenant may not have a very high level of English, may not understand written English and may not even understand written communication in their own language. Language problems alone warrant further central guidance on effective consultation.

11:30

Mr McGrigor: This is a further question on harassment. I note that recommendation 6 in your written evidence states:

"We would recommend that the Scottish Executive should, within this Bill, place a duty on housing providers to work alongside other agencies, across all sectors, in order to develop local racial harassment strategies . . . The Scottish Executive should also ensure there is adequate protection for victims of racial harassment."

We asked the Minister for Social Justice whether guidelines on equality of opportunity would include a duty to provide adequate funding and mechanisms, as well as procedures, for target hardening, such as rapid response property repairs for the victims of harassment and the provision of fireproof letterboxes. Were you satisfied with the answer that she gave on that? She did not seem to imply that there would be any duty to provide those things—which is what you are asking for.

Mick Conboy: By and large, voluntary partnership working on racial harassment has not worked. There are examples of effective partnership working, but it is far too patchy. Somebody might move from one area to another and find that, although they had a more than adequate response from, say, Lothian and Borders police, the police in the new area have a completely unco-ordinated approach.

Consistency is at the heart of the matter—we do not necessarily have the same standards where working together is voluntary. Acres of guidance have been produced by other agencies. We recently issued our own caseworkers handbook, about tackling racial harassment. What is missing

is putting that into practice.

If there is not a duty on people to work together to crack the issue, there must be a keen regulatory framework involving an inspection process. That inspection would have to include the expectation that people would work in partnerships. If that did not happen over a given year, there would be a further inspection after six months, after which time things should jolly well have been sorted out. The inspection bodies would then, if necessary, take other measures to ensure action. It is an either/or situation: either there must be a duty or we must crack down hard through the regulatory and inspection processes.

Linda Fabiani: Michael McMahon mentioned current monitoring arrangements. Scottish Homes' monitoring of housing associations includes some ethnic minority monitoring. Is that effective, or is it just paying lip service? How could those monitoring procedures be strengthened to really mean something?

Mick Conboy: The starting point would be to find out whether the monitoring data are used by the agency to inform its own planning. As an exercise, monitoring in itself is pointless; it must be built into the planning process to inform the allocation of resources. If Scottish Homes—or any other agency—is collecting monitoring data from housing associations and using it, or if the housing associations themselves are using that information as a base for future planning decisions, at first glance that would appear to be adequate.

Linda Fabiani: Do you think that it is adequate now?

Mick Conboy: I have reservations about the quality of the information, not only in some local areas, but at a national level, where hard-nosed, financial decisions can be based on the available monitoring information.

Linda Fabiani: Do you foresee problems, now that potential refugees are being sent to Scotland from England under the new national asylum support service agreements? We all know of the horrendous on-going problems for those folk. Once refugee status is granted, will there be future housing problems?

Mick Conboy: It is easy to suggest that a terrifying situation is just around the corner. I do not want to sound alarmist, but if there are still major gaps in provision for indigenous communities, to use the terminology, we should ask whether we are ready to accept an influx of tens of thousands of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds without being concerned about the likely impact of racial harassment. We experienced that in parts of Glasgow with the initiation of the dispersal programme last year. That was a horrendous experience for the

individuals involved and for the support agencies. If the number of individuals is set to increase dramatically, we must ask ourselves difficult questions about how prepared we are to deal with the situation.

Linda Fabiani: Do you feel that we are not taking on board the level of service that we need to provide?

Mick Conboy: I am unhappy with the current level of support, full stop, let alone looking at increased demand on those services and the increased need for support.

Linda Fabiani: Increased monitoring will be required too.

Mick Conboy: That is right.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): You spoke about the difficulty of partnership working and of involving all the stakeholders in a partnership approach. What will ensure that that happens?

Mick Conboy: I tend to view things in a straightforward way, and what makes our local services work is a straightforward question. If the idea of working together across agencies is happening in a number of areas, why should that not happen in relation to tackling racial harassment? I am not best placed to assess whether the problem is one of incorrect funding, regulation or inspection. All I can say is that it is not happening and there are gaps in levels of cross-agency working that must be addressed.

Cathy Peattie: Some partners are less equal than others. Organisations participating in partnerships often complain that they do not have the resources of the police force or a local authority and therefore do not have the same voice. How can we overcome that problem, which makes things more difficult for ethnic communities sitting round the table in such partnerships?

Mick Conboy: Our guidance suggests that there should be an agreed set of principles for the people round that table, irrespective of where they come from. That may sound fairly straightforward—perhaps too straightforward. There should be an agreed understanding among the partners of what each role is, what each contribution should be, what the purpose of the group is and how it should operate. There must be a locally devised protocol for how those partners work together, which takes account of the differences in resources.

Resourcing is not the only issue. Status is also important. The difference between the status of a local chief inspector, for instance, and the status of a local projects co-ordinator is quite dramatic. From our point of view, and from that of the racial equality councils, things are balanced slightly by the fact that the police, the local authority, the

health board and others look to the small organisations for a level of expertise that the bigger ones do not have. In a sense, the large organisations are buying expertise, just as they would from any other expert consultant, but they are not paying the same rates.

Cathy Peattie: It is difficult for small organisations to participate in consultation. If they are flooded with work—with this to do and that to do—how can we help them to participate? Should criteria for that be in the bill?

Mick Conboy: One task of the racial equality advisory forum that the minister established was to consider consultation mechanisms. A variety of approaches have been taken, essentially to find out what works and what does not, and whether one model works especially well and can be recommended.

The commission feels that a variety of approaches are needed. Those approaches should take account of where individual community organisations are starting from; it should not be a case of the Executive and its officials simply deciding that a particular stage is the right one at which to go out and consult on a green paper. The vast majority of organisations that we work with would—apart from anything else—have difficulty dealing with the language of and the conceptual issues behind a green paper. We have argued that the starting point for consulting organisations ought to be a clean sheet. They should acknowledge a desire to make changes, admit that they are not entirely sure of the direction they ought to be taking, and acknowledge the need to learn about the experiences of service users and non-users—because non-use of a service is often the issue. In our experience, rather than saying how they feel about a service, people often ask, “What service?” Our starting point would be to find out about the experiences of individuals.

Elaine Smith: Thank you for coming along this morning, Mick.

This question ties in with what Linda Fabiani was saying about homelessness. The stock transfer agenda is likely to change the role of local authorities from housing providers to housing facilitators. How will that affect your ability to protect the vulnerable groups that you represent?

Mick Conboy: To ensure that people's expectations are met, the regulatory framework will have to be, as I said before, quite stringent about the monitoring role of a regulatory body. The involvement of local authorities has not necessarily been a great success for ethnic minority communities. We will be looking at how the changes in the housing sector are managed and asking how that can be done to the greater

benefit of ethnic minority communities. Consultation, planning, implementation and the monitoring of those processes are all crucial.

Elaine Smith: And training?

Mick Conboy: HM inspectorate of constabulary highlighted training as being of particular concern. One of the major parts of the Lawrence report was on training for staff. From my insight into the police service and other organisations, training tends to be pushed back to be dealt with at a later stage. It is crucial that at some point—and I think the police are getting to that point—there is a major investment in a specific initiative to ensure that people are aware of what they do.

The Convener: That is fine. Thank you very much for coming along. We look forward to receiving your submission.

Reporters

The Convener: There is one brief item left before we move into private session. Members will remember that Irene McGugan and Nora Radcliffe, who are no longer on the committee, were the reporters on disability issues and on sexual orientation. I put on record again my thanks for the work that they did and the commitment that they showed on behalf of the committee.

I ask for nominations for the reporter on sexual orientation.

Cathy Peattie: Margaret Smith.

The Convener: Margaret Smith has been nominated. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Are there nominations for the reporter on disability issues?

Kay Ullrich: Linda Fabiani.

The Convener: Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

11:44

Meeting continued in private until 12:31.

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