

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 8 May 2001
(*Morning*)

Session 1

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

10th 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)

*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

*Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

*attended

WITNESS

Jackie Baillie (Minister for Social Justice)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lee Bridges

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Richard Walsh

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

The Chamber

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 8 May 2001

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting in private at 10:07*]

10:13

Meeting continued in public.

Interests

The Convener (Kate MacLean): The next item on the agenda concerns our new member, Jamie Stone. I welcome him to the committee. I hope that he enjoys the committee's work and I am sure that he will find it interesting. I ask him to make a declaration of interests.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I do not have any interests to declare. I thank the convener for her kind welcome.

Items in Private

The Convener: The next agenda item seeks the committee's agreement to taking items 5 and 6 in private. Are we agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Budget Process 2002-03

The Convener: Item 4 on the agenda is consideration of the budget process 2002-03. I welcome Jackie Baillie, the Minister for Social Justice, and Yvonne Strachan, from the Scottish Executive equality unit, to give evidence to the committee today.

I point out that Jackie Baillie has come along to give evidence on the budget process as it relates to equal opportunities. If the committee has questions that are more technical and financial, we may want to invite the Minister for Finance and Local Government to the committee.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Is Jackie Baillie not very good at counting?

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): I know the feeling.

The Convener: I am not suggesting that Jackie Baillie cannot count, but Angus MacKay is the minister with overall responsibility for the budget and we may invite him to a future meeting. The minister may make some introductory remarks if she wishes, after which time members can ask questions.

10:15

The Minister for Social Justice (Jackie Baillie): It would be helpful to be able to make some remarks, convener, and thank you for recognising that I can count. An overview of the budget in respect of all ministers' portfolios, however, rightly belongs to Angus MacKay.

Thank you for the invitation to attend the meeting. I am conscious that the committee made a valuable contribution to the 2001-02 budget process, particularly from the equality perspective. We welcome the recommendation that all departments must ensure progress towards achieving the overarching goal of mainstreaming equality and must reduce the equality gap in Executive policy making.

We noted the committee's wish that the 2002-03 budget report should present explicit information on equal opportunities policy and the impact that departmental spending plans will have on men and women. The committee will be aware that the equality proofing of budgets is complex and that the Minister for Finance and Local Government did not guarantee that figures would be available for 2002-03. It will take time, but we want to ensure that we have good disaggregated data to form the basis for allocating resources. We also need some means of measuring the impact of our policies on different groups. Work is proceeding in line with the timetable that was set out in the equality strategy.

Members will also be aware that ministers set up an equality proofing budget advisory group, drawing external expertise both from the statutory equality agencies and the Engender women's budget group. That advisory group is working closely with officials to take matters forward. The Executive has made a clear commitment, but we recognise that, because of the complexities, it will take some time to achieve true mainstreaming in our budgets, policies and legislation.

Kay Ullrich: The minister spoke about difficulties and I appreciate such problems, but no resources have been allocated over the next three years. Is all equality activity cost neutral?

Jackie Baillie: No. Kay Ullrich will appreciate that, when the equality unit was established, it had a budget of £0.5 million per year for the next three years. Recognising that the unit would be resource intensive, we doubled the budget to £1 million.

The purpose of the equality unit and of such funding is to provide direction and the tools for mainstreaming equality in policy and budgets. The unit will also offer support for consultative mechanisms to which we are committed as a Parliament and as an Executive. It is not for the equality unit to ensure that budgets held by departments are properly mainstreamed. That is a matter for individual ministers and departments; the equality unit will supply them with the tools to ensure that that happens.

Equality activity is not cost neutral, but £1 million each year for three years will enable us to undertake the necessary consultancy work and develop the processes that will put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure mainstreaming in both policy and budgets.

Kay Ullrich: The minister mentioned the Engender women's budget group. In evidence to the committee last week, Engender said that, although the Scottish Executive has committed itself to the mainstreaming of equality,

"There is no reference to equality or gender equality in the overall objectives or the departmental objectives. Equality is dealt with in a separate section".—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 1 May 2001; c 1208.]

The group said that equality was placed at the end of the report with a small budget that was increased in 2001-02, but will be static thereafter. Will the minister comment on that?

Jackie Baillie: I concur with the presentational points that were made about the annual expenditure report. Obviously, equality should have had more prominence. It was under the social justice section because that is my portfolio, but it is right that the entire Executive could give such a commitment. Officials from the equality unit are in discussion with finance officials to ensure

that equality has a better profile and is more prominent in the next annual expenditure report.

We announced that the equality unit budget would increase from £0.5 million to £1 million. We were careful about costing, because we recognise the scale of the task. We consider that £1 million is more than adequate to undertake the work that we outlined in the equality strategy. It is not for the equality unit to supplant the work that should be undertaken in departments as part of mainstreaming budgets. The real prize is putting up the sign throughout the Executive. I am sure that committees will play an active role in questioning different ministers on the extent to which mainstreaming occurs within their portfolios.

Kay Ullrich: The Engender women's budget group expressed disappointment that the details of objectives and targets varied enormously. In some areas they were specific, but no gender dimension was included.

Jackie Baillie: That is part of an on-going process. If we are to be successful in equality proofing budgets, we must first have good disaggregated data throughout all ministers' portfolios. We are disaggregating data for the social justice annual report. We have placed a new requirement on social inclusion partnerships, as part of their evaluation and monitoring framework, to disaggregate data based on gender, race, disability and sexual orientation. It will be enormously helpful to examine the impact that the spend is having on different equality groups.

We need first to fix the missing data. At the same time, we are developing the tools that will enable equality proofing to proceed systematically. We outlined in our equality strategy that the first phase of that work should be completed by autumn 2001, after which we will operate pilot schemes within budgets, so that we can learn from the experience of bedding down in a particular budget. The completion data for the pilot schemes is winter 2002.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Given what the minister said, does she believe that there is an overarching commitment to equality in "The Scottish Budget: Annual Expenditure Report of the Scottish Executive"? She mentioned presentational issues. Equality is mentioned only on page 28 of the summary document. Are departments dealing with the strategy differently? If the minister considers that there is no overarching commitment, or a commitment that is not as good as it should be, will she introduce training for departments?

Jackie Baillie: There is an overarching commitment. The equality strategy was signed off by both Cabinet and management groups. There is a buy-in at both political and senior

management levels in the Executive. We are keen to translate that policy commitment into practice, which will take time. We could impose something centrally on people, but there would be no sense of ownership. There are similar plans to engage Parliament in mainstreaming activity, but we want to ensure that all members of the Scottish Executive have a sense of ownership of the agenda.

We are looking at two pilot areas: from recollection, those are housing—largely because the Housing (Scotland) Bill is going through the Parliament—and schools. We will learn lessons from those pilots that will enable us to apply the mechanisms in a systematic and packaged way across the Executive. Individual ministers have a significant commitment to the issue. The question is how we turn that commitment into practical action.

We have been in dialogue with the Canadian Government over its gender proofing of budgets. I believe that it has taken the Canadian Government something like eight to nine years to get to a position where it can say that it is confident that it has adequately proofed all its budgets. No doubt commentators would say that there is still room for improvement.

Gender proofing budgets is a long-term process. The Executive is committed to that at political and senior management level, but we must turn that commitment into the practical day-to-day reality of civil servants developing policy programmes and budgets.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I appreciate that those things take time, but they are important. If policy areas are not shown in the budget, it is difficult to identify them and to say how they are to be measured and delivered. Last week's witnesses from Engender stressed that while the policies may exist, if they are not written into the budget they cannot be monitored. Where are the indicators and how can we measure policy? Although we are moving down the line towards doing that—and I welcome the minister's commitment—I am concerned that we are not there yet.

Jackie Baillie: I accept entirely that we must feed equality proofing through the entire process. I spoke earlier about using data to inform policy development. There are also tools that can be used to assist mainstreaming. Perhaps more critically, there is a need to devise a robust evaluation and monitoring framework. That would allow ministers—never mind committee members—to say that they can see precisely what is going on. As a consequence of that, the process becomes more transparent.

Part of the work of the equality unit will be to look at equality performance indicators. The advisory group will also take an interest in that, as it will want to help develop the tools and agree how equality proofing should be developed. We must have a mechanism to ensure that we have the means to monitor and evaluate and therefore fill gaps in the future, should that be necessary.

Cathy Peattie: The minister is talking about a hearts-and-minds job. People need to be committed. They need to see the value of doing something like this before they go down a line that they have never had to before. Does the minister see that process taking some time?

Jackie Baillie: No, because that is part of the process that the equality unit is working on closely with the Executive's personnel section. We are looking at how we roll out and organise training for civil servants that will ensure that they have an appreciation of the issues and the same starting point as the members of the Equal Opportunities Committee. We will ensure that civil servants understand the process of mainstreaming. We will invite external agencies, such as the Commission for Racial Equality, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Disability Rights Commission to discuss the most appropriate way of progressing mainstreaming. We are keen to ensure that the buy-in to mainstreaming equality is from the bottom to the top as well as from the top down. We must ensure that that becomes second nature to people as they develop policies, programmes and legislation.

Cathy Peattie: Does the minister see local authorities taking up the mainstreaming of equality? It is not always evident that that is happening in the groundwork on social justice and social inclusion. That should be the case. We must ensure that we include the people who are involved in that groundwork.

Jackie Baillie: Cathy Peattie rightly says that local authorities have a key role to play. We calculate that other bodies deliver 75 per cent of the Scottish Executive's overall budget. Our main delivery mechanisms include public sector agencies, enterprise networks, local authorities and health boards. We must get the package right, including the data and tools for people to use and the evaluation and monitoring framework. When we launched the equality strategy, we gave a commitment to roll it out across the public sector. The policy development stage is not the only stage that matters. It is at the practical delivery stage that it is possible to make a difference to people's lives. We are keen to see the whole process roll out across the public sector.

10:30

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): My question is about the credibility of Executive targets. We have already said quite clearly this morning that we have every confidence in the minister's ability to count. We also have confidence in the minister's ability to spell. The FABRIC criteria are so called because government performance indicators should be focused, appropriate, balanced, robust, integrated and cost-effective. The minister will know that there is no V in fabric. However, Engender told the Equal Opportunities Committee last week that the Executive's budget information was vague. If that is the case, does the minister believe that that could lead to questions about the credibility of Executive targets?

Jackie Baillie: Our targets are robust. As I have heard of the acronym FABRIC for the first time today, I will go away and study the report in some detail. Equality proofing is new to us all: few countries across the world are trail blazing in that area. We are attempting to gender proof and equality proof budgets, which takes us beyond gender and into the territory of race, disability and sexual orientation.

I believe that our attempt is the first in the world to gender proof and equality proof budgets across all the statutory equality areas. As a consequence, our discussions and explorations of ideas might be interpreted as vagueness. We do not intend to be vague. We have set a clear and measurable timetable for the equality strategy, with a number of milestones and outcomes that will take us along the road to full mainstreaming. We are committed to delivering the equality strategy and will report to Parliament on an annual basis.

The advisory group was set up so that we can learn from expertise outside the Executive. We invited Engender onto the advisory group as we are keen to learn from its research and experience across a number of sectors, in particular in the area of gender budgeting. We have also had a number of meetings with the Minister for Finance and Local Government to engage in a dialogue about how best to develop certain things.

Mr McMahon: The consultative steering group's financial issues advisory group suggested that Government accounting should use simple language and community-understood terms. Does the minister think that that has been achieved?

Jackie Baillie: I agree. I am all for simple language and easily understood terms. We are taking the Housing (Scotland) Bill through Parliament at the moment and it is not written in simple language. There is always room for improvement. The budget presentation has improved dramatically. However, if members ask

whether anybody could understand it and whether it is easily accessible, I would have to say that we should consider further how we present things.

Finance officials are looking at presenting the budget in alternative formats to ensure that it is truly accessible. However, at this stage, it makes a lot of sense for us to provide level 1 figures rather than figures at the more detailed level 2 or 3. Level 1 figures are more easily understood by members of the public. We have come a long way in our presentation of the budget and it is far more easily understood. The simple answer, however, to the question of whether we have further to go is, "Absolutely".

Linda Fabiani: I note what you say about the difficulties of ensuring delivery when 75 per cent of your budget is passed on. Nobody would doubt that that is difficult, but do you think that delivery can be ensured without legislative power?

Jackie Baillie: Yes I do. As you know, we have debated the equal opportunities reservations of the Scotland Act 1998 several times. We are in a unique situation. Scotland is small, which is an advantage, because it means that we can get people together. We can encourage statutory equality agencies, local government, health interests, enterprise companies and the private sector to work collectively to develop projects. I believe that, by offering encouragement, by putting in place evaluation and monitoring frameworks and by providing the necessary tools, delivery will be ensured. The Executive will provide support and guidance to those public authorities, but we shall do so in a way that delivers what the Parliament signed up for in the equality strategy.

Linda Fabiani: I admire your sincerity, and I hope that the strategy is achievable. You are keen on quoting evidence from elsewhere, but there is also evidence that shows that, even with legislative power, mainstreaming equality has been a long, slow, hard process. Catalonia is one example that comes to mind. Would you consider pushing for powers to make that happen sooner rather than later?

Jackie Baillie: As you will appreciate, and as I am appreciating more and more as the Scottish Parliament enters its third year, having legislative power does not in itself make things happen. Having the ability to issue guidance, to work with people and to ensure funding streams allows us to match policy priorities and changes culture more, and more quickly, than a piece of legislation can.

There is far more merit in getting people to own that ability and to feel that they have a responsibility towards equality in everything that they do than there is in saying, "Here's a piece of legislation, and if you don't conform to it we will beat you with a stick." I much prefer the carrot

approach, which I think will pay dividends for us and which does not supplant what we are doing.

Linda Fabiani: I can accept that approach and I treat it with respect. However, I think that it might be an easier job if we did that in tandem with legislation.

Elaine Smith: I know that the minister is committed to the voluntary sector. According to a review of direct funding from the Scottish Executive for the voluntary sector, there are more than 44,000 voluntary organisations in Scotland, which employ 100,000 staff, support 700,000 volunteers and generate about 4 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product, with an annual income of £2.2 billion. However, there does not appear to be any mention in the Scottish budget of a capacity for year-on-year evaluation of the effectiveness of that sector's output and delivery and a subsequent reallocation of resources. That is quite worrying for voluntary groups. Given the three-year budget cycle, does that mean that those groups that do not get funding in 2002-03 might as well shut up shop for the next three years?

Jackie Baillie: No. We are keen to address, within individual budget envelopes, the need to provide sustainable funding. That is something that the voluntary sector has argued for passionately, and I entirely agree with it. Equally, we want to have a pot available that allows new projects to come along, that allows us to be innovative and that does not close things down for three years. You will find that organisations are on different three-year funding cycles, so not everybody will come in year one and tie up the full budget for the next three years.

I am also conscious that, since the Scottish Parliament was established, the budget for the voluntary issues unit has almost doubled, and what the Executive provides through a variety of grant-making mechanisms has gone up by 28 or 29 per cent—I forget the exact figure. A lot of additional money has been made available to ensure that the voluntary sector is seen as a key provider of services. That has enabled us to take some strategic decisions on three-year budgeting that have been broadly welcomed.

The review of funding is a tidying mechanism at the moment, but it is the first stage of a process. We want to consider that review in the wider context of the development of social investment Scotland, which is a loan fund for the voluntary sector. We also want to consider how we link in with other funders, such as charitable funders and the national lottery, so that we have a commonly agreed set of principles and processes. When it comes to equality issues, we must be aware that it is not just how we fund local authorities that is important. We want voluntary sector organisations

to adopt similar mainstreaming principles in their activities, and that will be developed as we go along.

Elaine Smith: It is important to address that point and what you have said will reassure voluntary organisations.

Cathy Peattie: I am interested in mainstreaming in the voluntary sector. Voluntary sector organisations have welcomed changes such as three-year funding. In the past, monitoring evaluation has been used as a big stick rather than in a positive way, as I believe it can be. There are also important issues relating to how local authorities perceive the role of the voluntary sector. It is often difficult to encourage mainstreaming because there is an element of competition. Do you see the use of monitoring developing and changing?

Jackie Baillie: In the long term, that is the route that we want to travel. However, I want to make a distinction. Many local authorities will fund small voluntary organisations or community groups to undertake particular activities. The sums involved are often hundreds of pounds rather than thousands. I am not suggesting that we take mainstreaming down to that extent, but where local authorities clearly engage in service contracts or large grants to organisations, such as the local citizens advice bureau, Women's Aid branch, or a social care or elderly care project, we should be thinking about how to ensure that equality is taken on board by those groups. At the end of the day, those groups are providing a service with substantial sums of public money. In the long term, that will be an issue, but my starting point is to get the Executive's house in order, before we roll out mainstreaming more widely.

Cathy Peattie: In going down that route, will it be recognised that voluntary organisations may need extra resources to prepare for mainstreaming, that it needs tools and training and that it does not just happen overnight?

Jackie Baillie: I am aware that whenever we make announcements about local government and the voluntary sector there is a cry for more resources to enable organisations to carry out initiatives effectively. We are keen to do a lot of the leg work and policy work and to find the mechanisms and tools for people to use. What they get is a package. We recognise that there may be requests for additional funding in the future; we will meet those requests when they come to us.

Cathy Peattie: Will those organisations be involved in that development? Getting back to hearts and minds, it is important that they have ownership of those initiatives and do not feel that they are coming to them from on high. Do you

think that, through bodies such as the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, voluntary organisations will be involved in that process?

Jackie Baillie: I do. Rather than those initiatives coming from on high, a number of voluntary organisations have got there long before us and have been putting equality principles into practice on a daily basis. I am aware that the infrastructure organisations such as SCVO and Volunteer Development Scotland have been keen to ensure that those basic principles apply across the networks that they operate and among the members that they represent. It may be a case of us learning just as much from the voluntary sector.

Cathy Peattie: Absolutely.

Mr McMahon: My question is on the voluntary sector—specifically, it is on the black and minority ethnic voluntary sector. The minister produced a report in January which said:

“The provision of the new enforceable public duty is clearly a major development in addressing institutional racism”.

In its evidence-taking on the Scottish budget, this committee heard that, in April, challenges were created by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and that those challenges had not only been inadequately reflected in the Scottish budget but that they had not even been acknowledged in it. Do you have any comments on those concerns?

10:45

Jackie Baillie: I will deal with the latter point and then come back to the black and ethnic minority research. The Executive warmly welcomes the opportunity that is presented by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the new duty to promote race equality. I would make similar comments about part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which talks about substantial physical changes that will have a cost attached. The Commission for Racial Equality is developing a code of practice. We are keeping in close contact with it as the code develops. We are also keeping in close contact with the Disability Rights Commission on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

We want to take a measured view of what the Executive and the wider public sector should do to meet fully the requirements in the codes of practice. That will be reflected in future budgets. We need to ensure that, in a mainstreaming way, each department understands and budgets for its responsibilities in implementing the CRE's code of practice in relation to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the DRC's code of practice in relation to part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

I understand that the CRE's code is due in the summer of 2001. All departments in the Executive will consider the implications of it. We will also consider the resource implications for the wider public sector. Something's not being in the budget does not mean that it is forgotten. When we see the codes of practice, we will take a careful, considered and measured view as to what is required.

I will go back briefly to the research on the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector and its support needs. We are considering all the recommendations in the report Michael McMahon quoted because there is a lot in it that is of value in raising the profile of the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector in Scotland. As an initial step, we made available £100,000, I believe, to BEMIS—which stands for black and ethnic minority infrastructure in Scotland and is the newly formed infrastructure organisation to help the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector grow and access more of the funding streams that it has a right to access. That is one recommendation that we have acted on quickly; we are considering the others for the future.

Mr McMahon: Can I take it from what you are saying that inherent in the budget process is the fact that groups will act in response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995? Does not that argument tend to lead to a perception of vagueness? Should things be more explicit in the process, rather than it just being assumed that the voluntary organisations are working to the standard set by those acts?

Jackie Baillie: Let me leave aside voluntary organisations and talk about the equality unit. The equality unit has been working with the statutory equality agencies. We are aware of the developments of the codes of practice. The equality unit will drive what the codes mean down to departmental level. It will get departments to reflect on their responsibilities to meet the requirements of the codes.

For example, the health department sends most of its resources down to health boards from where they are sent down to acute trusts and primary care trusts. Because of that cascading effect, departments have to realise that to meet their new duties they will need to plan their policy programmes accordingly, and will need to consider investing resources in a particular way. All information will be collated and reflected in budgets, so there will be no vagueness.

We intend to drive the process down through departments, but we do not intend to replace what departments should do. That idea has caused tension. We all expect to move the equality agenda forward quickly. The big prize will be to get

the entire Executive and the entire Parliament and its committees to own that agenda. That is what we should be working towards—rather than having a dedicated unit at the centre that does things for everybody else. There is no vagueness. There is a process that will be driven home. This matter rightly rests with individual departments and their spending commitments.

Linda Fabiani: I think we all accepted that gender was the main issue that we had to start with when considering impact assessments, but there has been some disappointment. For example, the Equality Network is disappointed that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues are not identified in the budget. Has there been any forward programming for when LGBT issues will be considered in the budgets? Will what you have learned from the gender impact assessment be useful when considering, for example, disability or race issues? Have you set a time scale for meeting wider equality requirements?

Jackie Baillie: At the beginning of the process, we considered going down the route of simply gender proofing—which is what most of the demand was for—but we recognised that there was the bigger prize of doing proofing on the basis of equality, incorporating gender, race, disability and sexual orientation. Because we took the decision to widen our considerations, we invited the Equality Network to participate in the advisory group and it is doing so. Everybody who has an interest is at the table.

We are aware that most work in the gender field has been done. We want to learn from that, to inform our decisions in other equality areas. As we make progress, we will be working on equality proofing across the four areas, rather than simply on gender.

Linda Fabiani: I understand that nothing specific has yet been written down on when you will bring in LGBT or disability issues. Do you have a notion of when equality proofing will start to widen?

Jackie Baillie: We have said clearly that it will start to widen almost from the beginning of the process. Having agreed a plan of work and having agreed to map—as part of research that the budget advisory group has commissioned—the policy and the budget process, we expect preliminary work to be complete by the autumn of this year. We will then identify pilots in which we will undertake full equality impact assessments. That should be complete by the winter of 2002. We are building up the mechanism and the systems; some evidence of the widening of equality proofing will be seen in a couple of pilot areas by the winter of 2002.

Linda Fabiani: Good. Thank you.

Elaine Smith: When you answered an earlier question that was similar to Linda Fabiani's, you talked about statutory groups. As you know, we are carrying out an inquiry into Gypsy/Travellers who, in Scotland, do not seem to fall into any separate race grouping. How could the budget process include the needs of Gypsy/Travellers, given that they do not fall into a separate group? In our inquiry, we have heard about funding falling away from specific projects and about health and housing issues. Do you think that the information derived from the census will help to inform the budget process in future?

My final question is on gender. You produced statistics on gender this year—you were committed to doing that. Will you produce such statistics each year? Did you find this year's statistics helpful in informing the budget process?

I appreciate that I have asked quite a lot of questions.

Jackie Baillie: Much to Yvonne Strachan's horror—I am sure that it will not be—I will deal with your last question first.

We are committed to producing gender statistics annually, or at least as often as we are able to. I note that the publication of those statistics was welcomed by Engender. We are happy to continue to publish them as it is important that they are in the public domain. As Elaine Smith will appreciate, while we have statistics on gender, there are still gaps. We also need to gather information that is as good on race, disability, Gypsy/Travellers and a host of other areas.

The information from the census will be useful, although I understand that there is a two-year delay before the results of the census are made available, given the scale of the analysis to be conducted. That is not to say that we rely on information from the census alone. We have a number of data sources, from the Scottish household survey to a fairly major piece of research that we are carrying out throughout Scotland on ethnic minorities and social inclusion. That work will provide a clear picture, which would otherwise be missing, of what is going on in relation to the nature of ethnic minority communities, their economic activity and the extent to which poverty is a factor. It will give us information that will help to inform our policies on those issues.

While Elaine Smith made a legitimate point about travelling people, we took the view that involving the statutory equality agencies was important. I know that the CRE has done some work with the travelling community and that there are issues to do with the status of that community and whether Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority group. I am sure that members will

appreciate that such matters are reserved, so I will not stray into commenting on them.

We want what we are doing to have the net effect of ensuring greater awareness of the impact of our policies and budget decisions on all groups in society, not just on the four groups I mentioned. There are implications for Travellers, as Elaine Smith outlined, and for older—or younger—people. Our work will increase sensitivity and, therefore, awareness throughout the Executive and, we hope, the wider public sector.

While those issues are not being considered by the advisory group, that does not mean that they are not being considered at all. They form part of a wider piece of work that will be of enormous benefit to all sections of society.

The Convener: As there are no further questions, I thank Jackie Baillie and Yvonne Strachan for coming to the committee and giving evidence.

Jackie Baillie: It was much more enjoyable than attending the Social Justice Committee, convener.

The Convener: This is a much nicer committee.

Jackie Baillie: You can invite me back any time.

The Convener: We now move into private session.

10:58

Meeting adjourned until 11:07 and continued in private until 11:33.

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