

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 30 October 2001
(Morning)

Session 1

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

17th Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Kate MacLean (Dundee West) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con)

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

*Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

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

*attended

WITNESSES

Donald Carmichael (Scottish Executive Justice Department)

Ms Margaret Curran (Deputy Minister for Social Justice)

Yvonne Strachan (Scottish Executive Development Department)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lee Bridges

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Richard Walsh

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 30 October 2001

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 10:02]

Items in Private

The Convener (Kate MacLean): We will start. Jamie Stone is stuck in traffic, but we hope that he will arrive while we discuss questions for the Deputy Minister for Social Justice. Does the committee agree to take items 2, 8, 9 and 10 in private?

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): We must watch how many items we take in private. Of today's business, 40 per cent will be in private. I see no way round that, but concerns are being expressed about the number of committee meetings that are held in private.

The Convener: The committee comes out rather well from the overall statistics on items that are discussed in private. As for the items that will be in private today—

Kay Ullrich: I said that no other option exists today.

The Convener: There is no other option. We could have discussed the arrangements for a civic participation event in private, but I asked the clerks to put that item in the public part of the meeting. When I examine the agenda, I try to ensure that as much as possible of the meeting is held in public. However, I take on board Kay Ullrich's point.

Given that, does the committee agree to take items 2, 8, 9 and 10 in private?

Members indicated agreement.

10:04

Meeting continued in private.

10:19

Meeting continued in public.

Taking Stock (Gender Issues)

The Convener: I welcome Margaret Curran and her officials to the committee. I will not introduce everyone as you all have name-plates. However, it would be useful if the officials could say who they are when they answer questions.

As we all know, the consultative steering group recommended that meetings to take stock be held so that committees could be updated on the progress of work in Executive departments. This is the first such meeting that the Equal Opportunities Committee has held. Time is quite short, Margaret, so if we do not cover all our questions, either the gender reporter or I will put the ones that we miss to you in writing after the meeting. Before we move to questions, would you like to give a short introduction?

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): Thank you, convener. I am pleased to be here this morning. I am well aware of the work of the Equal Opportunities Committee on gender and a range of other issues. It is important that we talk about progress on gender issues and I acknowledge the interest of the committee and the work of its reporter.

Committee members will know that the equality strategy was launched last November. The strategy demonstrates our commitment to putting equality at the heart of the Executive's work. On 18 October, we published a preliminary report that details what we have achieved so far in our efforts to make equality a reality to improve people's lives. The report shows the breadth and scope of our work. It also shows the sharing of responsibility throughout the Executive—from transport to public health, from enterprise to education—in challenging discrimination and promoting equality. In particular, the report highlights the ways in which we are involving equality groups in making policy and putting it into practice. We are setting up consultation mechanisms with various groups. That process includes the appointment of a consultant who will advance the consultation work with women.

Work on gender equality is going on throughout the Scottish Executive. That creates particular challenges across departmental boundaries. However, detailed evidence of progress can be seen in a recent publication called "Preventing violence against women: action across the Scottish Executive". The publication covers work that is being done in housing, transport, policing and awareness raising.

We pride ourselves on the amount of work that we do in partnership and we regard this committee as partners. Much has been said about the number of women in the Scottish Parliament and our achievement of the historic figure of 37 per cent representation. For some, that is the end of the process; for us, it is just the beginning. There has been a lot of progress in the Parliament as well as in the Executive. We have had the first committee bill and the first members' debate on domestic abuse. However, we know that there is much still to be done and we look forward to working closely with the committee.

Kay Ullrich: In April, we were informed that the Scottish Executive advisory group on equality in budgets had proposed the appointment of a specialist adviser to work with the Executive in developing gender impact analysis in the Scottish budgetary process. What progress has been made?

Ms Curran: I have been looking into that issue. The first stage of guidance on the equality proofing of budgets was issued at the end of last year. We foresee future incremental developments as we learn over the years. The Minister for Finance and Local Government has established an equality proofing budget advisory group. The group first met in November 2000 and involved a range of key equality organisations. It commissioned research on the budget process; that research is due to be completed in November 2001. At the beginning of October, an expert seminar was held. A range of different interests attended and I believe that it was very productive. I am pleased to say that finance officials have been involved from the beginning of the work on equality proofing the budget. We have also been taking expert advice from Canada where, as members will know, there has been significant progress on such issues. I met Canadian officials myself.

All expert opinion agrees that, to make progress on the equality proofing of budgets, progress must also be made on the equality proofing of policy. The two must go in tandem. We cannot divorce one from the other. Our work on the budget process is therefore closely tied in with our work on mainstreaming. Yvonne Strachan is the lead official on that work and she will give the committee more details.

Yvonne Strachan (Scottish Executive Development Department): I would like to add to what was said about an adviser. In the early stages of discussions with the Scottish women's budget group, the issue of having an external secondment to the Executive was raised. As the women's budget group worked with the Executive, it was acknowledged that research and mapping were needed with a view to placing a specific adviser or secondee with us in the Executive. That

issue is still with us, but everyone concerned has acknowledged that this is not the right time for such a secondment. As the minister said, everything that we have done has been done collaboratively with external bodies to try to find the right approach. We think that the pace of our progress has been right.

Kay Ullrich: So the issue of having a special adviser is still on the agenda?

Yvonne Strachan: Yes.

Kay Ullrich: Does the Executive plan to publish a gender audit in 2002? Is the Executive committed to maintaining the production of a gender audit?

Yvonne Strachan: As members know, the gender audit was first published by Engender—an external body. On previous occasions, ministers have assured the committee that work will continue on supplying disaggregated data on gender. This year a publication called "Men and Women in Scotland: A Statistical Profile" was produced. It is intended to produce a publication in April 2002—or certainly in the spring—on disaggregated data for men and women. It will have a social focus and a range of chapters. What the content of those chapters will be is still under debate and we would like to explore further, with a number of external bodies, what the most valuable content would be.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I welcome the Executive's equality strategy. The minister mentioned mechanisms to facilitate consultation. I am interested in that. I am also interested in partnerships. I am sure that the minister agrees that the voluntary sector has a key role in partnerships.

Ms Curran: Yes.

Cathy Peattie: I am sure that she also agrees that those organisations need tools and support to allow them to participate. Too often, the committee has heard organisations say that it has been difficult for them to participate in consultation because they have not had the time or the resources to do so. What is being done to ensure that voluntary organisations can participate?

Ms Curran: Thanks, Cathy—am I being asked an easy question?

Cathy Peattie: I am sorry to ask everything together.

Ms Curran: There was a lot in that but I will try to answer some of your points. We are committed to consultation. Cathy Peattie will know that women's organisations have been discussing ways of consulting, at both local and national level. We want to talk to those organisations about how we can make progress. There was frustration at

the women in Scotland consultative forum: people feel that processes are too formal and do not cut to the kind of issues that women want to discuss. We are therefore trying to reorganise the processes and to have more locally based consultation forums that can focus more on communities of interest. That may let us get into more detail and get away from big headline consultations. Many women's organisations want to get into more detail with us.

We are also working with Engender and the Glasgow Women's Library about a consultative database to ensure that we are in touch with all the different kinds of women's organisations that are out there. We have to tap into those networks and let them tap into us. We are about to appoint a consultant to help us learn from other organisations about the different styles of consultation and their effectiveness.

I know that Cathy Peattie is interested in the involvement of local communities. We are working with a women's organisation in Fife and we are funding a short-term project on consultation. The focus is very much on local women's organisations and working in local communities. I am quite interested in learning from that. Depending on the lessons that emerge, the project could be applied throughout Scotland.

At every meeting I go to, I am asked a question along the lines of, "Can we have more money please?" I understand why, but it is a double-edged sword. People say that we must listen to them and talk to them, but consultation fatigue can set in. I do not want to be complacent, but perhaps we overdo the partnership bit. Perhaps we should consult people more effectively. However, in our defence, I would say that the Executive and the Government have significantly changed their relationship with the voluntary sector.

Last weekend, I was at an experts weekend. They said that the relationship has changed systematically. That is not to say that funding is at the optimum level or that equal opportunities has been mainstreamed enough in the voluntary sector—it has not. We need to talk with the voluntary sector about how it supports women's organisations in that field and how we ensure that the moneys we give it are being used to deliver on a women's agenda. I will happily pursue that.

10:30

Cathy Peattie: My question was not targeted at funding for the voluntary sector. I simply sought to highlight the fact that the voluntary sector is involved—or, rather, umbrella organisations in the voluntary sector are involved—in facilitating consultation and need resources to do that. The Executive should have discussions with the

voluntary sector to ensure that that consultation takes place.

Ms Curran: I am happy to pursue that.

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): The equality strategy outlined your desire to improve relevant statistics, develop equality indicators, raise awareness of equality issues and promote best practice. Will you update the committee on the equality indicators that the Executive currently uses and the extent to which those are employed in policy development across the Executive?

Ms Curran: That is a significant point. Your timing is perfect—there is a meeting tomorrow between the equality organisations and officials, which will start the process of discussing some of the details of the issue.

You are right: indicators are necessary—general good will is not sufficient, nor is aspiration without outcome. We have a strong commitment to measuring outcome as well as aspiration. We have all known the cost to equality of not doing that in the past. We are trying to ensure that we measure outcome properly, because we are aware that what we establish at this stage will have implications down the line.

We are working with the equalities co-ordinating group which, as members will be aware, consists of the different organisations that I meet regularly, and officials meet more regularly, to cover a range of issues. We want to work with those organisations in significant detail to ensure that we set the right equality indicators. I understand that our approach—which is a process of working with the key organisations to get the results that we want—might be frustrating for people. We do not necessarily always go for early progress as we believe that it is worth taking our time to work through the issue.

Mr McMahon: If there was not agreement about the indicators among those with whom you are dealing, how would that be overcome? Would it just be a case of finding some indicator that you intended to use, even though that might not be satisfactory to those who were looking for information?

Ms Curran: That is exactly the position we are in. The workshop tomorrow will consider where progress is being made, what key information we need to pull together and how we start to make decisions that allow us to make progress at the same time as incorporating some kind of evaluation in the indicators. That will ensure a shared understanding of what we seek to achieve, which is based on the agencies' experience. However, I do not mean that nothing will happen until everyone is happy, because that would take too long. The workshop is about making some

progress, but that progress must be realistic and the indicators must be effective—not just produced for the sake of it.

Mr McMahon: I would like to come back with another question later.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Thanks for coming along this morning.

Following on from what Michael McMahon was saying, can you explain how the Scottish Executive is promoting best practice, specifically on gender equality? I want to tie that in with the social justice department. There are many social justice issues that are particularly women's issues. How are you making the links and developing that?

Ms Curran: First, I will talk about general best practice. I will then move on to the point about social justice, which is significant.

We are taking a range of best practice measures. They are partly about working with Executive staff to ensure that the whole of the Scottish Executive owns the equality agenda and feeds that through the different organisations. If you would like to pursue that, the officials will have more detail about the different mechanisms. The measures are also partly about working politically—at a ministerial level—to examine the different portfolios. Mainstreaming is an issue—our officials work with officials in other departments on that. We need to work on the policy and the legislative arms to promote best practice. Some of that is about working across the Parliament—through the Equal Opportunities Committee—and by having contact with a range of organisations.

As the Government of Scotland, the Executive must ensure in delivering its work—for example, funding for the voluntary sector—that it delivers on a women's agenda as well. I have said before that I am conscious that we have lost some of the political focus on the women's agenda—it has become partially buried in the equality agenda. People think that, because there are so many women in the Parliament, we have already achieved equality. Sometimes there is still some surprise when a women's analysis is highlighted. I am keen to pursue the women's agenda.

The social justice agenda goes to the heart of many of the equality issues. On Saturday I am speaking at a conference of partnership representatives—community representatives, essentially—on social inclusion partnerships. I will announce the equality action note that will be embedded in a lot of the work of the social inclusion partnerships. I am aware that there was not a sharp enough focus on how the SIP spending was benefiting women in communities. I know that officials have tried to get the data that

show us whether the SIP moneys and practices address a women's agenda. We have not got the information quite right yet—the data are not as sharp as we would like. Some of our work on neighbourhood statistics and locality budgeting should begin to help us to understand the women's agenda.

There is still a job to be done in working with the partners in the SIP process to ensure that a women's agenda is pursued. Some interesting work is being done on women's issues—on housing, for example—but more needs to be done. We want to pursue that kind of agenda.

Elaine Smith: To return to the first point, I want to add that some departments in the Executive are better than others at recognising that there are women's issues. A good deal of work needs to be done in some departments. I leave it at that.

Ms Curran: I am prepared to say on the record that I think that as well. If you want to give me names, I will be more than happy to pursue them.

The Convener: Would you like to give names to the committee, minister?

Ms Curran: Do not tempt me.

Mr McMahon: Are there any current or planned awareness-raising exercises or strategies on gender issues in Scotland?

Ms Curran: If I do not answer the question properly, come back to me. I might use part of the answer that I gave to Elaine Smith.

Do you mean issues such as close the gap?

Mr McMahon: I mean planned programmes that are being encouraged actively or rolled out by the Executive.

Ms Curran: The social justice action note that we are producing is part of that. I hope that that will publicise our work with the SIPs. The close the gap initiative that was launched last March is also part of that. We are working with the trade unions on that and want to pursue it. I met a representative of the Equal Opportunities Commission last week to continue that work.

In addition, we are examining work in other countries. There are interesting models not only in Canada—although we leaned heavily on the Canadian experience—from which we can take good practice and use it to promote gender and women's issues here.

Yvonne Strachan: I would like to add some of the practical things that have been done, for example around the European structural funds.

The Executive worked with the Equal Opportunities Commission on the production of a toolkit on mainstreaming for European structural

funds. That was well received not just in Britain, but in Europe. As a result, work is being done to consider how that might be extended to mainstreaming within projects, not just in the overall programme.

We have been able to build on the process of developing good practice that has been considered by others and to extend that provision to deliver European structural funds in a better way. That example accompanies the other instances that the minister has raised.

Mr McMahon: Are such programmes developed on the basis that they will be tried for, say, a year or do you continually assess how they are working and attempt to alter them when you identify problems?

Ms Curran: We assess them at different levels.

One of the advantages of the equality strategy is that we did not go for a couple of quick wins. We did not tick off equalities on our list, but went for a more systematic and strategic approach. We identified certain things that we had to turn around if we were ever to make deep change on the issue. Staff training was part of that, as was mainstreaming policy and legislation.

Initiatives and a bit of risk taking are also important. We have to be prepared to work with certain organisations, knowing that we might get it wrong with some small projects and might have to drop or change them. It is possible to do that if the overall strategy is right, because everything fits into that strategy.

We put a lot of emphasis on dialogue with other organisations that will give us feedback on what has worked for them—what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong. Monitoring and evaluation—using the resources of outside researchers and consultants and so on—also help us to understand the process. We use a package of measures.

The Convener: A few members want to ask supplementary questions on that, but I want to move on to another area of questioning. If we have time, we will come back. I am conscious that there are important agenda items further on. We can supplement the current session with written questions to the minister.

Kay Ullrich: I come from a background of criminal justice social work. I want to ask a specific question about women in the justice system.

There is a so-called benefit trap for women in the justice system. A woman who is offered a place in a bail hostel might choose not to take up tenancy in the hostel because she would lose her housing benefit—the housing benefit would be used to pay for the place in the bail hostel—and so could lose her local authority tenancy. Many

women choose to go to prison rather than take the option of a bail hostel or a rehabilitation unit because the housing benefit would be used to pay for that accommodation and they would lose their tenancy.

Is the Scottish Executive making any efforts to circumvent that, particularly in light of the overcrowding crisis at Cornton Vale? I believe that many women choose prison for the practical reason that I have described.

Ms Curran: I appreciate your commitment to resolving the issue. I am familiar with the principle of the housing benefit trap in other contexts—criminal justice is not really my field. Rather than pretend that I know the details of the matter, I will consider it further and I—or the relevant minister—will contact the committee on that. I am not sure about our thinking on that—particularly on the Cornton Vale issue—and I would not wish to mislead you in any way.

Kay Ullrich: The issue is one of equality, because it affects women rather than men.

Ms Curran: I accept that entirely. I have spoken with Iain Gray about some of the work on issues related to women that is being done in his portfolio—I am sure you will know about the women offenders group and so on. I know that there is progress on the criminal justice front because I have dealings with that on other issues—the women's agenda is recognised. Considerable progress has been made recently, but I am not aware of the specific issue that you have raised.

The Convener: The committee accepts that, as well as covering equality, the issue is associated with other departments and with reserved issues. We can write to you to obtain a fuller response at a later date.

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): Prostitution is not something in which I have a background by any manner of means, but I did take the opportunity to go to the recent annual general meeting for the Scottish prostitutes education project. I was fascinated to meet a lot of the women who are involved.

Will you tell us what is happening? There is difficulty with the tolerance zone, which has not been accepted, and with moving on. There is a vast range of issues to do with prostitution. Why do women get involved—are they forced into it or are they dependent on drugs and regard prostitution as a way of financing their abuse? Are there any developments in approaches to or strategies for tackling issues to do with prostitution?

10:45

Ms Curran: I will focus on my remit, but if there are wider issues perhaps I can pursue them later. You are right: there are huge issues around prostitution. I have some experience of the drugs field from the ministerial group on drugs. In Scotland, the connection between prostitution and drugs is strong and it is something to which we must pay serious attention. We have to work on the two in tandem.

I am not sure whether you are aware that, in the social justice portfolio, we have created a social inclusion partnership called routes out of prostitution. If you have a particular interest in this subject you might want to visit the SIP. It is significant that the Scottish Executive made the commitment to deploy resources to assist women to make their own choices in the profound social issues that they face. The aim of the SIP is to prevent women—vulnerable ones in particular—from becoming involved in prostitution and to try to provide viable alternatives to women who wish to leave prostitution. There are practical issues of housing and access to drugs programmes and so on, but it is also about trying to destigmatise the women who have been involved in prostitution. We need to have a more sophisticated approach to issues surrounding prostitution. I understand that that SIP is working well to try to pursue such issues.

Mrs McIntosh: When I spoke to some of the women involved, I was fascinated by the differences between indoor and outdoor prostitution. What concerns does the Executive have about the women who are working indoors and outdoors? From what I can gather, there is quite a distinction. There are grave concerns about both groups of women. It is not the case that women who work indoors are safe from attack.

Ms Curran: There are no glib assumptions about the realities that women face. That is why the approach we take to working with organisations is that those women should articulate their experiences and be assisted to make representations to the agencies, which need to appreciate the circumstances in which those women regularly face violence. I am more familiar with the situation in Glasgow, where many women's organisations recognise the range of difficulties that women can face. It is about trying to find a programme of strategies to support those women in different circumstances.

A drug agency such as Turning Point in Glasgow has a dedicated project to support women. Such support is often through the criminal justice system because—Kay Ullrich made a similar point—many women, perhaps inappropriately, receive fines. They could certainly be supported slightly differently through the

criminal justice system. If we got the preventive and supportive work right, we might avoid some of the difficulties at the other end of that continuum.

Kay Ullrich: It is a vicious circle with the fines.

Mrs McIntosh: There will always be a debate about whether it should be a social justice or a criminal justice agenda.

Ms Curran: It is both.

Mrs McIntosh: It is, but there will always be a debate about that.

I recall that, when the Parliament met in Glasgow, we highlighted the differences between the approaches taken in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The basic problem seems to be that there will always be customers for prostitutes. Are we considering how to deal with the people who use prostitutes? Will we consider focusing more attention on the users rather than the people who are providing the service?

Ms Curran: I have always subscribed to a "Don't blame the victim" analysis in any approach to women's issues. It has often been the case that the victim is blamed—that is why we get policies wrong. I would not want to be simplistic or glib about those issues because they are significant. I would not want to glorify or romanticise prostitution in any way—for many women it is a very hard life. That is why we place so much emphasis on alternatives.

I cannot speak about the justice ministers' plans. Do you wish to say anything, Donald?

Donald Carmichael (Scottish Executive Justice Department): We do not have any specific plans on that at the moment. It is true to say that the law tends to focus mainly on the prostitutes themselves. The common law can be applied to them in various ways. It can also be applied to the clients, but it tends to be applied less in their case and in relation to such things as kerb-crawling. You may know that the Home Office has a major review of sexual offences generally. We have not gone down that road, largely because we rely heavily on the common law. We have taken the view that we have greater flexibility to deal with the issues that Westminster is struggling to deal with because it has tied itself up in statute over the years.

We are watching the issues, but our specific focus is rather more on some of the other issues you mentioned earlier, for example the links between prostitution, drugs and imprisonment. We are looking at ways of breaking those links. For example, we are considering fines enforcement and whether it is appropriate that people should be sent to prison for fine default. If, at some time in the future, we propose to remove that power of imprisonment, that would have a bearing on

whether some prostitutes end up in prison.

There is also the drugs court initiative in Glasgow, which may more systematically try to prevent people who would otherwise end up in the criminal justice system from going down that road at all. We are focusing on specific initiatives rather than a grand review of the criminal law on prostitution.

Cathy Peattie: I have about a dozen more questions, but I will behave myself.

I am interested in toolkits for mainstreaming. Has any thought been given to something similar for SIPs? My experience of SIPs is that they are very male oriented. Women have to shout loud to get their issues on the agenda, which they do very well, but ensuring mainstreaming or a women's agenda in SIPs might be quite helpful. We have been discussing prostitution, but proactive work to keep women and young girls out of prostitution and drug abuse might be successful. Has any thought been given to directing money, as a way of saying, "This needs to happen"?

Ms Curran: That is an interesting point; I would not rule anything out. We want to work in a way that leads to more effective practice, where people own what they are doing. Saying to people, "Here is yet another instruction from the Scottish Executive about how to run your SIP" frustrates them. Although I am aware of that, I do not rule out your suggestion about mainstreaming; I would certainly give some consideration to it. Many SIPs have been going through the working together, learning together programme, whose organisers I am meeting on Monday. How equality issues have been pursued and reflected on is on my agenda. Your suggestion is something that I will consider. I would use the levers of financing for that—I am learning that that is how to do it.

There is a range of organisations in Scotland that do not always call themselves women's organisations, although some are beginning to. Some girls' organisations have things to say and are doing proactive work that we need to support. That has to be at the heart of our work if we are ever to get community regeneration right. We are committed to putting women's issues on the agenda, but we want to do it by working with people rather than by imposing that agenda on them.

Cathy Peattie: Experience of working with people is good, but the problem lies with the people who are making the decisions. The work needs to be done with local authorities and partner agencies.

Ms Curran: Absolutely. I am not saying that we are waiting for people finally to be persuaded, because we all know that that has not necessarily worked. Sometimes we just have to say, "It will

happen." I am not backing off either approach. In a way, we can do both.

Elaine Smith: I want to move on to the wider issues of violence against women, but first I want briefly to pick up on what Lyndsay McIntosh said about prostitution. We could say that prostitution is part of the wider agenda of violence against women. Would you be able to endorse that particular approach publicly in the routes out of prostitution project? If so, would you consider supporting similar initiatives throughout the country?

Ms Curran: The fact that we fund routes out of prostitution indicates that we endorse such a model. I am open-minded about proposals to tackle that issue and the range of issues that surround it. Some of the work that Turning Point does is a way of tackling that issue as well. There are different models and different ways of doing it. We would expect any project that we support to tackle issues such as violence, to understand the violence against women that is at the heart of many of the problems that surround this issue and to recognise the social and economic causal factors that lead to the problem.

Elaine Smith: Much of the work that I have been doing recently as the gender reporter has highlighted the pervasive effects and, sadly, the continuing tolerance of the many forms of violence against women in our society. The Scottish Executive advertisements that are being shown at the moment say that one in five women live with the constant fear of violence. Figures from the Zero Tolerance Trust show that one in two boys and one in three girls between 14 and 21 think that there are some circumstances in which it is okay to hit a woman or to force her to have sex.

A lot of work is being done on domestic violence—that work must go on, but I am concerned about the wider issue of violence against women. Does the Executive have any plans for funding strategies for the prevention of violence against women? I refer in particular to educational tools and your comments on page 12 of "Preventing violence against women: action across the Scottish Executive", which talks about the Zero Tolerance Trust's respect project and says that it will be rolled out to other schools in Scotland in the 2002 academic year. That is something I feel strongly about and I would like you to expand on it.

Ms Curran: I recognise the commitment that is being shown in that area and I am aware of the Scottish figures and the work that is still to be done. The Executive and the Parliament have made good progress in recognising the issue. Much of the debate has focused on domestic violence, but that is within the context of the wider analysis of why violence takes place. As you will

know, I have been clear about that analysis in any parliamentary debate in which I have taken part. It is about the gender impact of violence. We have to understand power relationships and why women are victims in such a range of situations.

The analysis is important. One of the messages that has come across from many women's organisations is that that analysis has brought about a strategic approach and ensured that it is not just a matter of a little bit of funding or persuading one minister to fund something when another minister takes a different view. That analysis is now owned throughout the Scottish Executive; there is work to be done. We have taken a decision about funding that is to go towards domestic abuse, but that has, properly, been a strategic priority for us. However, that does not stop us doing work in a range of initiatives.

One of those initiatives, which Elaine Smith mentioned, is the respect pilot. The evaluations of the pilot, which involves work in schools, have shown it to be successful. That is positive and significant. I visited North Ayrshire recently, where impressive work is going on in a local primary school. The teachers were very supportive of the process and there was evidence of real partnership working. In some institutions in Scotland, we are touching buttons on these issues in a way we have never done before, but that is not to say that there is not a mountain to climb. There is a lot of work to be done.

I met the Zero Tolerance Trust, which has been invited to sit on the prevention sub-group of the Scottish partnership on domestic abuse, to discuss where we are in developing the work. We see the way to tackle domestic abuse as lying in the broader issues of prevention. Anything we learn from that we can roll out. I will work with my colleagues in education to ensure that there is appropriate funding so that the lessons from the respect pilot can be rolled out. Strong and positive work is being done and I am sure that I can persuade colleagues to develop it.

11:00

The Convener: We will have one last question, from Michael McMahon.

Mr McMahon: The minister will not be surprised that my question is another that looks for funding.

Agencies that provide services to the homeless have reported strong links between homelessness and child sex abuse. Few services seem to be provided for sexually abused women, who are at risk in the community, and there is a lack of safe supported accommodation. One organisation, SAY Women, reports that there is more demand than they can meet and that the funding situation is highly unstable. Will you clarify what actions, if

any, the Executive is taking to improve provision?

Ms Curran: I am aware that the committee has heard such evidence and has an interest in that matter. We recognise the need for such provision. The Executive funds a variety of organisations that fund other organisations to carry out works—through local authorities, the voluntary sector, a range of other organisations and some of the housing budget strands—to ensure appropriate provision. The issues that the committee raises need further consideration. If funding streams are not delivering and there are gaps for key target groups locally, that situation needs attention. I will be happy to continue to discuss that with the committee.

The Convener: I thank the minister for coming and look forward to her returning to the committee.

Ms Curran: I do not look forward to returning.

The Convener: That will be part of the taking stock process. I am sure that we will write to the minister with some questions that we did not have a chance to ask. I thank everyone for attending.

Reporters

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is the appointment of reporters on sexual orientation issues and disability issues. Changes to committee membership mean that those positions have not been filled officially for some time. We asked members to e-mail the clerks if they were interested and Cathy Peattie expressed interest in being the reporter for sexual orientation issues. Does the committee agree to that appointment?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The other reporter is to be on disability issues. I nominate Gil Paterson to be the reporter. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next agenda item is reports from reporters. Elaine Smith was ill when the previous meeting was held, so we held her report over until today's meeting.

Elaine Smith: The report is of a meeting that I had with the Zero Tolerance Trust—I raised an issue that I discussed with the minister today. At the meeting with the trust, we talked about the respect initiative pilot.

The Zero Tolerance Trust works to raise public awareness of violence against women and to make it unacceptable. Each member should have received a copy of its respect initiative briefing. The trust has lately moved into targeting younger people and is seeking to influence their attitudes to violence against women and respect within relationships. That is the basis for the respect initiative.

At the end of my paper, I note that the Zero Tolerance Trust would like the resources and interventions for the initiative to be part of the core five-to-14 education curriculum. I understand that Learning and Teaching Scotland and two education authorities are enthusiastic about the materials involved and I was heartened to hear the minister's answer to my question about the education department.

I recommend that we note the report, congratulate the Zero Tolerance Trust on its work, agree to support its aims to roll out the respect campaign, and send a copy of the gender reporter's paper and the accompanying brief to the convener of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and the Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs, Jack McConnell. We should also write to the Deputy Minister for Social Justice, Margaret Curran—given the evidence that we have just received—to let her know what we are doing and give her copies of the report and the brief.

The Convener: Does anyone have any questions for Elaine Smith on that report? If not, Elaine has outlined the recommendations. Are those agreed to?

Members indicated agreement.

Elaine Smith: I previously submitted a private report to the committee, as part of the private consideration of the work programme. I would like to clarify whether that report could be included in the bound volume that will be produced of the gender issues report. The volume is in draft at the moment, and is therefore a private paper. However, once it is published, could that report be included in it?

The Convener: I do not think that any committee member would have a problem with that.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Does the committee's race reporter have anything to report?

Mr McMahon: I am continuing to set up a series of meetings to address religious discrimination. As two bills might be published on the subject—one a member's bill and another from the Executive—I shall try to pull that work together to provide information on the background to some of the issues that may arise. That might help the committee when it comes to consider those bills, if they come before us. I am trying to build up a portfolio of information on those issues, but nothing substantial will come out of that until the series of meetings has been undertaken.

The Convener: Does anybody have any questions on that?

Members: No.

The Convener: The conveners liaison group has agreed that conveners should report back to the committees on events that they have attended in their capacity as conveners. If events involve a lot of expense, the committees have to give permission for the conveners to attend them anyway. In future, therefore, conferences that I have been asked to speak at and meetings to which I have been invited in my capacity as the convener will be reported to the committee for its information. I do not know where on the agenda they will be reported, but they will be included somewhere.

Civic Participation Event

The Convener: Item 6 is the civic participation event. Members have a paper on that. The event should be interesting, as no positive response has been given to the Executive's response to our report on the Gypsy/Traveller inquiry. Most members will have received a copy of the letter that Mark Kennedy of the Scottish Gypsy Traveller Association sent to Henry McLeish. I found the response quite disappointing.

Mrs McIntosh: I do not have a copy of that letter.

The Convener: He has sent it to all members. I received a copy in my office yesterday. I am sure that you will receive it.

It will be interesting to see what feedback will be given to that response at the civic participation event. Does anybody have any comments on the paper?

Members: No.

The Convener: A draft press release is being handed out to members. I suggest that we adjourn for five minutes, to give members a chance to read the press release.

11:09

Meeting adjourned.

11:19

On resuming—

The Convener: Members have had a chance to look at the draft press release. Are members agreed that it is okay?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We need people to chair the four workshops. Kay Ullrich has agreed to take the health and social services workshop, Michael McMahon has agreed to chair the accommodation workshop and Cathy Peattie is to chair education. We therefore need someone to chair the police workshop.

Mrs McIntosh: I will do that.

The Convener: Lyndsay McIntosh will chair the police workshop.

Chhokar Inquiries (Jandoo Report)

The Convener: Item 7 is the "Report of the inquiry into the liaison arrangements between the police, the Procurator Fiscal Service and the Crown Office and the family of the deceased Surjit Singh Chhokar in connection with the murder of Surjit Singh Chhokar and the related prosecutions" by Dr Raj Jandoo.

We have been discussing this matter since the committee began because it has been going on so long. We now have to decide what to do about Raj Jandoo's report. There are various options. The committee can agree to note the report and take no further action or we can agree to hold a special meeting and take evidence on the report. I suggest that we should hold a special meeting and take evidence on the report. The "Report of an inquiry into Crown decision-making in the case of the murder of Surjit Singh Chhokar" by Sir Anthony Campbell is more about legal competence and one of the justice committees is discussing it.

Before we go on to further discussion, could we agree a course of action?

Mr McMahon: Last week, I noticed the difficulties that Mr Chhokar had when he was attending the Parliament. It would be more appropriate if we found a date when we could go through to Lanarkshire and make ourselves available to the Chhokar family.

Kay Ullrich: I support that suggestion.

Mrs McIntosh: So do I.

Mr McMahon: The clerks know that the facilities in South Lanarkshire and North Lanarkshire have been checked out. I do not have a preference.

Kay Ullrich: We should choose whichever venue is most appropriate for the family.

Mr McMahon: The geography is as broad as it is long. However, I know that South Lanarkshire Council's headquarters were used during the Scottish Qualifications Authority inquiry and the facilities have been checked out. It might be possible to hold the meeting in Motherwell. Perhaps we should leave it to the clerks to decide. It would be appropriate to hold the meeting in Lanarkshire.

The Convener: I take it that the committee is agreeing to have a special meeting and that the meeting should be held in a location that is as convenient as possible for the Chhokar family. We will ask the clerks to consult with the family and their representatives to find out which venue would be convenient for them and would meet the

committee's criteria.

Members indicated agreement.

Kay Ullrich: Do we have an approximate date?

The Convener: We will have to hold the meeting as soon as possible. I suspect that it will have to be on a Monday as the meeting will be outwith the Parliament. I know that that will not be convenient for everybody but I hope that as many people as possible will attend a special meeting at reasonably short notice.

Kay Ullrich: I cannot do next Monday.

The Convener: I do not want the committee to get diaries out and discuss dates. We will get back to members and contact them by e-mail so that the meeting can be arranged as soon as possible.

We also need to decide what we want from that meeting.

Cathy Peattie: We need to be clear about the remit of the meeting. We do not want to start another inquiry. If the clerks are going to contact people, particularly the Chhokar family, we need to be clear about what we want to do, how we take evidence and what will happen with the information that we gather.

Mr McMahon: We do not have the wherewithal and it is not appropriate for us to redo the investigation. We have to reflect on the commitment that we have always given to consider the outcome and take the Chhokar family's views into account. We have to see what gaps remain and determine whether the committee can contribute to the closing of those gaps or whether that can be done only through a public inquiry. If we interpret the remit in that way, we will be on fairly solid ground. However, if we go beyond that, I am not sure that we will achieve much.

Kay Ullrich: We must be clear that we will not be holding another inquiry—that is the bottom line.

The Convener: The committee will take evidence from various witnesses—they have yet to be decided—and decide whether to make recommendations to the Crown Office. We will not rule anything out from the recommendations that we might make once we have heard the evidence.

Under standing orders, we must ask the Parliamentary Bureau for approval to hold a formal committee meeting outside Edinburgh. I do not envisage any problems with that.

Does the committee agree that the broad areas of questioning should be made available to witnesses prior to the meeting, so that we can have an informed and full discussion? We will not give witnesses the questions that they will be asked; we will give them just the broad areas that

we will cover.

Mrs McIntosh: If the witnesses know those areas before they come, that will help to define exactly what we will be doing.

The Convener: We should also contact the Chhokar family and their representatives to advise them of what the committee has agreed.

Kay Ullrich: What about an interpreter?

The Convener: The same arrangements will be in place as when we were discussing the remit of the report with the law officers. We will make sure that simultaneous translation is available on the day. I presume that the *Official Report* of the meeting will be translated into different ethnic languages.

It was suggested that the deputy convener, the race reporter, the clerks and I should have a discussion with the Chhokar family and their representatives beforehand, so that we do not come across the same problems that arose when the committee tried to take evidence on the inquiry. Whether that meeting takes place will be up to the family and their representatives. We can make the offer when we write to them to inform them of the committee's actions.

Mrs McIntosh: It would be worth while holding that meeting at their convenience, at a location convenient to them.

The Convener: Yes, we will do that.

Do members have anything else to say on that? Is that course of action agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We now move into private for items 8, 9 and 10.

11:27

Meeting continued in private until 12:05.

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