

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 29 October 2002
(*Morning*)

Session 1

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

16th Meeting 2002, 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)
*Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)
Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jim Johnston

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Richard Walsh

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 29 October 2002

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:14*]

The Convener (Kate Maclean): I apologise for the delay in starting the meeting. We did not have a quorum until now. Various apologies have been received. Cathy Peattie and Elaine Smith are ill; Kay Ullrich has submitted apologies; Jamie Stone is at the Finance Committee meeting, which clashes with this one; Gil Paterson will be late because of his attendance at the Procedures Committee; and Tommy Sheridan arrived late due to delays in his train journey from Glasgow.

A British Sign Language interpreter, Mary McDevitt, is present, and will be interpreting for the deaf.

Items in Private

The Convener: Does the committee agree to take items 5 and 6 in private?

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Just to be consistent, I advise the committee that I would like my opposition to that to be recorded.

The Convener: With Tommy Sheridan's dissent recorded, is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

10:15

The Convener: The next item is on equal pay. A paper has been circulated to members. Members will recall that, at our meeting on 1 October, we agreed to include an item on an equal pay review on this meeting's agenda. Do members have any comments or questions?

Tommy Sheridan: First, I thank the clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre for producing respectively a very informative background paper and a briefing. I hope that the documents will be helpful. The most cogent points relate to what the National Assembly for Wales has tried to do with regard to equal pay, which was something concrete as opposed to something abstract. The briefing tells us what the Assembly tried to do and how it went about it, but I do not know what the results of its work were. Has the pay structure that was introduced led to a closing of the gaps that were identified in the initial review? If that information exists, could it be made available soon? That would better guide us in our trying to do something here in Scotland.

The briefing contained some interesting background stuff about what the Assembly was trying to achieve, but I would be dead interested to find out whether the work carried out in Wales has closed the pay differential between men and women who carry out similar work—either those who are directly employed by the Assembly or those who are otherwise affected by the review.

The Convener: We could ask SPICe to carry out further research. I understand that Scottish Parliament personnel are researching the results of what the Welsh Assembly has been doing. Does the committee agree that we should ask SPICe to carry out a bit more research?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: There are no other questions or comments on the papers. They are there more for information than for anything else.

Reporters

The Convener: A report on the gender reporter's fact-finding visit to Inverness has been circulated, but the reporter, Elaine Smith, is not here to speak to it. If anybody wants to comment on the report, they can do so, but I suggest that people will be able to ask Elaine questions at the next meeting at which she is present. Does anyone wish to make any comments now?

Tommy Sheridan: Usually when we hear about a fact-finding visit, we hear about the sunny clime. Poor Elaine! Inverness disnae have much sunshine, although it has lots of nice people.

The Convener: The Equal Opportunities Committee is known for having fact-finding visits to places that are quite inclement—and I do not think that we have had any foreign fact-finding visits yet.

Does Michael McMahon have a reporter's report for the committee?

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): Yes. I received a photocopied document, produced by the Commission for Racial Equality but sent to me by the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities. Apparently, the council has identified some contradictions between what the CRE has said and what the race equality advisory forum—REAF—recommended. It would be worth carrying out further investigation to find out exactly what the issues are. They are to do with how ethnic monitoring is done and how the results are dealt with. The council has asked us to look into ethnic monitoring and the contradictions between what REAF recommended and what the CRE has said.

Perhaps once the document has been circulated to all committee members and background research has been done, we could return to the matter and have a fuller discussion. As the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities has said, the committee should certainly look into the matter. The committee has always been concerned about monitoring and the collation of data. If the committee agrees, I will give the document to Jim Johnston and get it circulated.

The Convener: Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Mr McMahon: Secondly, I wish to point out that the convener and I have now set a date to meet the Chhokar family and their representatives. We are to meet them in Hamilton on 13 November. It will be a preliminary meeting, when we will be able to discuss what the committee can do, or would hope to do, in relation to the reports that were published last year on the situation surrounding the death of Surjit Singh Chhokar. I would like it to

be put on the record that we have been pursuing the matter and that we now have a date for a meeting in the diary. We will bring the matter back to the committee with the hope of discussing the subject more fully.

The Convener: Does Tommy Sheridan have any questions on that?

Tommy Sheridan: No. I am glad that the work is going ahead. I wonder whether we could agree to send a short message to Mr Chhokar this Sunday, when there will be a memorial service and a wreath will be laid at the site of the murder. Given our contact with the Chhokar family over the past year, I think that it would be appropriate for us to send a wee message of support and solidarity.

The Convener: I am happy to do that, on behalf of the committee. I can have a message sent off today, which we will get translated if there is time. We will try to have it translated, as we tend to translate all our correspondence.

Tommy Sheridan: Brilliant.

The Convener: We have been trying to organise meetings for some time, but have been unable to do so because of Mr Chhokar's ill health. The purpose of the meeting in November, which we agreed to some time ago, is to ensure that the way in which the subsequent formal committee meeting is conducted and where it is held enable the Chhokars to have their input in the way in which they want. In the past, they have felt unable to do that. Michael McMahon will report back to the committee after the meeting, before we arrange the formal committee meeting.

Is that it on that item?

Mr McMahon: That is it.

European Year of People with Disabilities 2003

The Convener: The fourth item is a report on the European year of people with disabilities. A paper has been circulated to members. Does anyone have any comments or questions on the paper? In its work, the committee has probably not covered disability issues as fully as some other equal opportunities areas, so I am keen for us to become fully involved in the European year of people with disabilities.

Tommy Sheridan: The suggestions in the paper, under the heading "Recommendations", are positive and we should support them enthusiastically. We should try to ensure that the meeting on 3 December and the report back from the event in Athens on 28 January are well attended by a broad spectrum of disability campaigns and representatives.

Mr McMahon: I agree with that.

The Convener: So we agree to the recommendations in the paper.

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We now go into private session to consider an approach paper and a draft report, which the committee has not signed off.

10:22

Meeting continued in private until 10:32.

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