

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 27 January 2004
(*Morning*)

Session 2

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

2nd Meeting 2004, Session 2

CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green)

*Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP)

*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP)

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Ruth Cooper

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Chamber

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 27 January 2004

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:36*]

Item in Private

The Convener (Cathy Peattie): Good morning and welcome to the second meeting in 2004 of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I do not know whether there will be any other apologies, but we have received apologies from Elaine Smith. Do members agree to take in private item 3, which is consideration of an approach paper that will include discussion of potential witnesses?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Mainstreaming Equality

10:37

The Convener: On the next item, a briefing paper on mainstreaming equality was issued to members with the agenda. Have members any comments on the paper?

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I have a point that I think might be worth mentioning. The Audit Committee said that it would ascertain what the Auditor General was doing on equalities issues. It is worth putting on record that the Audit Committee is taking the matter beyond parliamentary committees.

The Convener: Do members want to raise any other items or issues from the paper?

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): The different responses from different committees were interesting. Some committees seem to take mainstreaming in their stride. The Public Petitions Committee said that it would produce another paper on the issue, which is good to hear, and some committees gave details of what they intend to do; for example, the European and External Relations Committee referred to staff training. Other committees went into a lot of detail.

I felt that there was a big contrast between the committees that just said "Yes, of course" to mainstreaming and the ones that talked about mainstreaming in detail. The extract in annex C from the *Official Report* of an Education Committee meeting is interesting because it shows that that committee returned to the issue and recognised that it had missed out aspects of mainstreaming from its work, which is a more honest way of viewing the issue. The fact that the Education Committee considered mainstreaming in so much detail indicates how seriously that committee takes it.

I am a bit concerned about the Justice 2 Committee's position, which is that it does not want its approach to be proscribed by equal opportunities. I believe that its approach ought to be so proscribed, so perhaps further correspondence is needed.

The Convener: Are there any other views? Clearly, it is up to each committee how it interprets our letters and how it develops mainstreaming work. Generally, I have been pleased with the committees' responses. However, it is vital that they take on board mainstreaming. Marlyn Glen suggests that we write again to the Justice 2 Committee. Do other members have a view on that?

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I do not think that the Justice 2

Committee's letter reads as strongly as Marlyn Glen suggests. I had thought that that committee said that it would report on what it had done on mainstreaming, but would not make a particular issue of mainstreaming. I got the impression that, if a mainstreaming issue cropped up, the Justice 2 Committee would refer to it in one of its reports, but that the committee felt that it might not always be appropriate to refer to mainstreaming. I do not think that the committee was against what the Equal Opportunities Committee is trying to do on mainstreaming.

The Convener: The issue is how mainstreaming is reported on in, for example, an annual report and what a committee can show to have been done to ensure that mainstreaming has been considered. In theory, committees should be mainstreaming equal opportunities issues all the way through their work—there should not be a separate hook for mainstreaming that allows a committee to say that it has dealt with the issue and the job is done. The whole idea of mainstreaming is to make equal opportunities an integral part of every piece of committee work.

Margaret Smith: The Justice 2 Committee may have baulked at the kind of tokenism that suggests that there has to be only a line or two on mainstreaming in an annual report as opposed to continuing work being done on it. The Justice 2 Committee has done work recently on the Vulnerable Witnesses (Scotland) Bill, which is for the sort of people that mainstreaming is all about. Therefore, the Justice 2 Committee has been doing important work on mainstreaming equality.

Rather than write formally to the Justice 2 Committee with the assumption that we understand what it meant, it might be worth clarifying privately whether that committee's response means that it does not want mainstreaming just to become a line in an annual report and that it is doing mainstreaming work continuously. Justice is an important issue, but it is important that all committees embrace mainstreaming across the board.

Mrs Milne: I put badly what I was trying to say previously. I agree with Margaret Smith.

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): My feeling is that Margaret Smith is being rather too kind to the Justice 2 Committee, which said in its letter:

"concern was expressed that committees should not lose their autonomy of operation and flexibility."

That is not what mainstreaming is about. I felt that the whole paragraph that included that statement was rather strong in relation to what we asked the committee to do. Either I am misinterpreting what the Justice 2 Committee is saying or it is misinterpreting what we asked it to do.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): The different responses to our letter show that we need clarification of what the Justice 2 Committee is saying. The way forward is to ask for clarification.

The Convener: It is true that it is not appropriate for the Equal Opportunities Committee to be proscriptive. Each committee must work in its own way regarding the taking of evidence and so on. We can pick up how committees are dealing with mainstreaming by monitoring annual reports. We will probably need to keep an eye on how committees are doing, but it is not for us to tell committees how to do their work: we simply ask committees to take responsibly their role of considering equal opportunities.

Shiona Baird: I did not think that it was ever our intention to be proscriptive. That idea is what worried me about the Justice 2 Committee's response.

The Convener: No—it was not our intention to be proscriptive. The issue is how committees interpret mainstreaming issues. We expect them to take that responsibility seriously and to make mainstreaming an integral part of all their work. However, we will be able to monitor annual reports and so on. As members have no further points, do they agree the actions that paragraph 14 of the briefing paper proposes?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The committee will now move into private session to discuss an approach paper on the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill.

10:43

Meeting continued in private until 10:55.

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