

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 28 June 2005

Session 2

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2005.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Licensing Division,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by Astron.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 28 June 2005

	Col.
GYPSY TRAVELLERS	1053
DISABILITY INQUIRY	1080

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

11th Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP)
Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)
*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
*Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)
Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP)
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Lesley Irving (Scottish Executive Development Department)
Johann Lamont (Deputy Minister for Communities)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Zoé Tough

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 28 June 2005

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:01*]

Gypsy Travellers

The Convener (Cathy Peattie): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 11th meeting in 2005 of the Equal Opportunities Committee and remind them to turn off their mobile phones. We have apologies from Frances Curran, Phil Gallie, Elaine Smith and John Swinburne.

Item 1 on the agenda is our final evidence-taking session in our review of Gypsy Travellers. I am pleased to welcome to the committee the Deputy Minister for Communities, Johann Lamont, as well as Helen Jones and Lesley Irving.

We have quite a lot of questions, but before that I give the minister the opportunity to make a statement.

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): Thank you very much. I am very happy to be at the committee. If my eyes look a bit red, sore and weepy, please do not think that it is because I am in front of the Equal Opportunities Committee. Although there is not much evidence of summer having arrived, for me it has arrived in the shape of hay fever, so I hope that members will forgive me for that.

I am glad to be here today to discuss what the Executive is doing for Scotland's Gypsies/Travellers and its future plans for Gypsy Traveller communities. I am, of course, aware of the submissions that have been made to the committee by others. I have noted their comments and hope to be able to address the committee's questions.

I do not understate the importance of the issues that have been raised and the challenge that we face in addressing them. As an Executive, and as MSPs committed to an equal Scotland, we must be concerned when evidence comes forward in the shape that it has. We recognise the significance of that.

This is an important stage in the development of a Scotland-wide response to Gypsy Traveller issues. Since the committee's 2001 report, the Executive has taken significant steps forward in specific areas such as health and education. However, we recognise that progress has not been as rapid or as cohesive as we and others

would have liked it to have been. Since the winding-up of the Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People, we have been increasingly aware of a sense among Gypsy Traveller agencies and clients that there is a void at the heart of service delivery in this area and that there is a need for stronger, clearer direction from central Government.

I am pleased to be able to tell the committee that we are taking steps to address some of the concerns that have been raised with the Executive and with the committee over the recent period.

The issues for Gypsies/Travellers were raised during our race equality review, on which we will report shortly. It is clear that much still needs to be done to address their concerns. Furthermore, I have been following the committee's evidence-gathering process with interest. I recognise that a number of valid comments have been made. In particular, it has been pointed out that the Executive has not placed specific measures such as the publication of the guidance on unauthorised encampments within a broader strategy that reflects the contribution, differing needs and issues of the Gypsy Traveller communities. As a consequence, such measures stand out in stark relief and seem to signal that Gypsies/Travellers are a problem to be managed rather than a community to be served. As the committee will know, that has never been the intention or the desire of the Executive. However, if that is the perception, we need to address it and so we shall.

As an integral part of our work on race equality, we will establish a short-life strategic group specifically to examine developing our work on Gypsies/Travellers. The group will not reinvent the wheel, but will seek to build on the work of the race equality review, the committee's inquiry and the work of the Commission for Racial Equality. We will explore the composition of the group with Gypsies/Travellers and with organisations such as Save the Children, the Scottish Human Rights Centre and the Gypsy Traveller community development project. It is a given that members of the communities will be on the group.

We will also work closely with the CRE to ensure that our work is complementary to the Scottish strategy on Gypsies/Travellers that the CRE is developing. We will, of course, also be in dialogue with the committee and we will draw on the committee's work, including the final report of the current inquiry.

We are conscious of the community tensions and concerns that exist in both the settled and Gypsy Traveller communities and of the need for more responsiveness at national and local level. Much depends on the good relations and improved understanding that can be fostered locally; hence it is important that local authorities

engage with the issue. We acknowledge that placing the work in a broader context will assist in providing a clearer picture of the issues and a better understanding of what needs to be done to meet the needs of all.

I have acknowledged that much remains to be done, but I am here today to report on what has been done since the committee's inquiry in 2001. The committee has received a lot of evidence of good practice and progress and, on behalf of the Executive, I hope to reinforce that.

I appreciate the need to promote better awareness and understanding of Gypsy Traveller culture throughout Scotland, so I am pleased to confirm that the Executive has granted funding to the Glasgow Gypsy Traveller community development project. In collaboration with the national resource centre for ethnic minority health, the community development project will undertake an awareness-raising training project for national health service and local authority staff. The project will also highlight the new hand-held patient records that have been developed, which will assist Gypsies/Travellers to access health care, especially when they are travelling, as they allow for greater continuity of care. We will shortly issue guidance to health boards to outline how the records should be used.

The latest stage of the committee's inquiry offers a valuable opportunity for all those who are committed to supporting Gypsies/Travellers and settled communities, as it gives us a chance to review what we are doing, what we are failing to do and what we are not doing well enough. Further to the evidence that Gypsies/Travellers presented to the committee, I know that some Gypsies/Travellers feel that the Executive is not doing enough and that they are being excluded from policy making and key events, such as the recent Edinburgh conference. I understand that my colleague, the Minister for Communities, has dealt with the issue of the conference in a letter, which the committee should have received.

The decision not to invite Gypsies/Travellers to the conference was not made lightly but taken after careful consideration of the issues involved in their attending the event. The decision was taken jointly by the organisers in the run-up to the conference. It was recognised that, if we are to address the needs of Gypsies/Travellers—which were well-documented in the evidence that the committee received for its previous inquiry—the attitude and approach that local authorities adopt is critical. Therefore it was agreed that, as a first step, the issue could best be examined in more detail with authorities if service providers were given an opportunity to discuss the issue openly and frankly. The organisers believed that, on that occasion, such a discussion could best be

achieved by limiting the audience to service providers rather than widening it to include communities and other interests. However, the organisers were clear that the event should be informed by communities, so there was prior discussion with members of the Gypsy Traveller communities. The organisers also intend to follow up the event with a meeting with Gypsies/Travellers and key related organisations to discuss the issues and outcomes that emerged from the day.

As the committee will know, we rarely suggest an exclusive approach to events, but such an approach is occasionally justifiable when the objective is to secure better understanding and progress. We are absolutely clear about the need for continued dialogue between authorities and Gypsy Traveller communities. That is the basis on which authorities are expected to proceed with their work in this area.

The conference featured workshops on housing, education, roadside encampments and social services. The conference organisers are currently drawing up a draft report, which my officials will discuss with members of the communities as a follow-up to the conference. The outcome of that follow-up and of the conference itself will be a good practice guide, which will be disseminated to all public sector service providers in Scotland. I will ensure that the committee is provided with a copy of that guide at the earliest opportunity.

We will also hold a follow-up conference next year to assess progress, at which Gypsies/Travellers will be invited to participate. I emphasise again that we are fully committed to engaging directly with the Gypsy Traveller communities. The decision not to involve them in that one-off event was taken so that we could maximise the potential to identify bad practice and to encourage good practice.

A recurring theme in the committee's earlier evidence-taking sessions has been site provision and site standards. I am pleased to announce that the Executive has established new arrangements for funding local authorities to provide new sites or to upgrade existing sites. Since April 2004, some councils have used their allocations under the private sector housing grant to fund work on sites. However, we will now make available an additional £1 million per year until 2007-08 specifically for Gypsy Traveller sites. The money will be spent in a way that meets their needs.

I believe that there is a will to work together to address the issues and that the climate is changing from one of intolerance and reaction to one of understanding and proactivity.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to set the scene. I am happy to answer any questions.

The Convener: Thank you. I welcome your statement. The committee would be interested in the work of the short-life strategic group. When will it be set up and when do you expect it to report?

Johann Lamont: Given that it is, by definition, a short-life working group, we do not want its work to trail on forever. We see the group being identified by September and reporting by December.

The Convener: Likewise, we welcome the statement on finance, because we have heard that local authorities are reluctant to do work because of the lack of resources. We are interested in seeing what develops.

My colleagues will want to pick up on other issues as we go along, but I will start. In 2001, the committee recommended that Gypsies and Travellers be regarded as an ethnic minority until such time as there was a court decision under the Race Relations Act 1976 to formalise their status. Four years on, it seems that, for a variety of reasons, there is unlikely to be a court case. That leaves a group of people in Scottish society vulnerable and unprotected against inappropriate attitudes and behaviour, while similar groups, such as Irish Travellers, benefit from legal protection while they are visiting Scotland. What are your views on recognising Gypsy Travellers in Scotland as an ethnic minority?

Johann Lamont: You are right that a court decision requires to be made to recognise a racial group under the Race Relations Act 1976. Race relations legislation is reserved to the United Kingdom Government. We know that case law in England has ruled that Roma and Irish Travellers are protected by the 1976 act. However, as you said, no Scottish test case has ever established that Scottish Gypsies/Travellers are a racial or ethnic minority group for the purpose of the act. We acknowledge that and we know that the matter is reserved, but we also recognise that Gypsies/Travellers in Scotland are distinct groups who have specific requirements and who, in common with all Scotland's minority ethnic communities, require the same level of protection from discrimination and abuse. That is our position while we await a case being brought. That understanding shapes our commitment to service delivery.

The Convener: We know from the Commission for Racial Equality and witnesses that it is difficult to get a case to court. When cases are prepared, often they are settled out of court and sometimes families are reluctant to have such high-profile involvement. I accept your commitment to making progress and I accept that the issue is reserved. Is there an opportunity to close the gap in the Equality Bill at Westminster, given that it could be many years before we see a court case that would move us forward?

Johann Lamont: That is a matter for those who are taking the bill through Westminster; the issue might be being explored. Given that the current overarching legislation is set by Westminster, the challenge in our area of responsibility is how we deal with discrimination in Scotland. Even while we are waiting for a case to be brought, it is not all right to discriminate against people on the ground of their ethnicity.

The Convener: I accept all that. Obviously, an element of this is reserved. However, even though the Equality Bill is reserved, does the Executive feel that it has a role in trying to make the people involved in it more aware? My understanding is that they are not aware of the status of Gypsy Travellers in Scotland. I would welcome the opportunity to raise the matter with them. The committee has the same issues that the Executive has. We recognised in our previous report that it was not within our remit to do work that related to Westminster or a court decision. Would the Executive consider having an informal discussion with Westminster, given that the Equality Bill is under way?

Johann Lamont: Given our commitments within the communities portfolio and to the broad issue of equalities, I am entirely comfortable with flagging up at ministerial level the fact that there are issues and that there appears to be a gap. That is a matter of dialogue, which I am entirely happy to have.

10:15

The Convener: Thank you—that is welcome.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I am pleased with some of the points that are made in the Executive's updated response to our recommendations—my questions will be geared towards them. Cathy Peattie asked about timescales, and I will try to press the minister on that a bit more. However, my first question is about how the representation of Gypsy Travellers is monitored and about good practice in that regard. In the Executive's updated response to our recommendation 3, the Executive refers to its publication, "good practice guidance - consultation with equalities groups". Do you have evidence that anyone is using the guidance and how do you monitor its implementation?

Johann Lamont: I guess that the evidence of whether organisations are effective in consulting people is if groups in the equalities field say that they are comfortable with the standard and quality of consultation. I accept that the evidence that the committee has had highlights the need to address some issues. We are doing that. For example, if a body makes a bid for some of the moneys that will be available for the development of sites, we will

have to establish that it has consulted the appropriate Gypsy Traveller groups. We need to find mechanisms for doing that, but the Executive is comfortable with working with equalities organisations.

Ms White: The problem is that the guidance is not legislation; it simply states that it is up to each local authority or public body to do what it can. If the representations that you receive from Gypsy Travellers are that they are not getting good services, might money be withdrawn from the public body that is involved if it has not followed the guidance? How will you monitor compliance without the onus being on the people to say that they are not receiving services? There does not seem to be an audit of services for which public bodies are given money.

Johann Lamont: We expect all organisations to be mindful of their responsibilities in relation to equality matters. Obviously, we need to have dialogue with all public bodies about the extent to which they meet their responsibilities under equalities legislation and beyond that. The expectation in the good practice is that, if an organisation delivers a service to any group, it will work with that group to identify its needs. That point applies far more broadly than simply to Gypsies/Travellers; it applies in all sorts of fields. The strength of some service quality is that it is rooted in speaking first to people about their needs. That applies equally to Gypsies/Travellers.

That is another issue that the short-life strategic group will consider. There are key issues about people feeling that they have not been fully engaged with or consulted—we need to consider where people go if they feel that way. That is one of the issues that we could flag up.

Ms White: I take your point. Basically, you monitor the situation through Gypsy Travellers saying that they are not getting a service from local authorities, but you do not keep a list of local authorities that use the guidance. You just write to the authorities and say that the guidance is part and parcel of their responsibilities. Do you plan to do any more than that?

Johann Lamont: Generally, in the field that we are talking about, one needs to be more proactive. We cannot wait until folk who are having a bad time finally tell us that they are having a bad time; more dialogue is needed, which is one of the things that we will try to achieve.

Ms White: That brings me neatly on to my next question, which is about the steps that have been taken. You have mentioned that a strategic group has been set up. Your updated response to our report notes:

“Steps are being taken across the Executive to ensure that the needs of Gypsies/Travellers are taken into account when developing policies.”

That came across strongly. You have already mentioned one step, but will you tell us what other steps are being taken and give us an example of how the needs of Gypsy Travellers have been included in policy initiatives or legislation?

Johann Lamont: Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, local authorities must have a local housing strategy. As part of that strategy, we expect local authorities to have regard to the needs of Gypsies/Travellers in their area. There are other examples, although we may need to reflect on the matter further. Race equality schemes, which are monitored by the CRE, must set out the methods of consultation, including consultation with Gypsies/Travellers.

Ms White: I take on board the point about housing. You have also mentioned that the short-life strategic group will definitely have Gypsy Travellers on it. I think that you said that you hope to set that group up in September. It must be done as quickly as possible, because it came over strongly to the committee that, although site managers and various other people are involved in policy decisions, Gypsy Travellers never seem to be involved in them. Gypsy Travellers are mobile, are dispersed throughout Scotland and lack representation. Even the submission from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland says that the absence of a national representative group is problematic. Apart from the short-life strategic group, will you fund a national group of Gypsy Travellers that can consider policy? I think that that was recommended in the committee's 2001 report.

Johann Lamont: I agree with you that it is always easier for anybody who is trying to deliver services to have a group of people to whom they can speak, even if it is simply a sounding board. We all know that that is the case in other fields, but we also know that, in relation to equalities, it is important to get hold of the diversity and complexity of experience, as well as the ways in which it expresses itself in different places. Therefore, we do not want only one person or group to reflect experience, and I suspect that, because of the nature of Gypsy Travellers as a group, we would not capture that diversity and complexity easily.

If there were a national body, it would be expected to establish that it was representative and would be accountable for what it did. If it did that, funding could be available. My understanding is that there is currently no such national body, but that does not mean that we should not talk to whichever groups exist. It is suggested that, particularly because Gypsy Travellers move around, they are reluctant to come forward about some of the difficult issues that they confront. We must be alive to that but, if there was a national

group and if there were representative bodies that met the funding criteria, there would be no reason why they could not be supported.

Ms White: You talked about granting funding to a group in Glasgow. Will you elaborate on that and on what role it will play? Is it a liaison group or a representative group?

Johann Lamont: It has done a lot of work already in Glasgow and we will support it further. Lesley Irving might have a bit more detail on that.

Lesley Irving (Scottish Executive Development Department): We will work in partnership with the Gypsy Traveller community development project—which is based in Glasgow and has done a tremendous amount of good work for the communities—to arrange awareness-raising training on the hand-held records that are to be made available to health boards, as the minister has announced today. We will also work with the project to arrange cultural awareness training for local authority staff to enable front-line staff of service providers to provide culturally appropriate and sensitive services. Many witnesses who gave evidence to the committee called for such training.

The Convener: That is a bit of good news. The committee always welcomes resources for awareness training, because we frequently find that people who should be aware of particular issues are not.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I, too, welcome the minister's statement this morning; anything that takes the agenda forward is welcome.

I will ask about accommodation. The committee recommended in 2001:

"the design of amenity chalets should conform to both the Below Tolerable Standards and Standard Amenity standards for housing".

What steps has the Executive taken to ensure that that is complied with? Are you happy that the amenities that are now provided on local authority Gypsy Traveller sites throughout Scotland meet the required standards?

Johann Lamont: That is quite a challenging issue. The tolerable standard is a minimum acceptable standard for a house. For that purpose, a house is defined as being

"any part of a building ... which is ... occupied as a separate dwelling".

The difficulty is that amenity units on sites were originally built to provide washing and lavatory facilities only; the living accommodation on sites is in Gypsy Travellers' own caravans, so the tolerable standard does not apply to amenity units, as they are not houses.

I hope that the changing needs of Gypsy Travellers can be addressed as a result of the discussion about the improvement of sites, but I am not convinced that that can happen by using the tolerable standard, because the tolerable standard was not intended to apply to amenity units.

Marilyn Livingstone: Perhaps I can tease the matter out in my next questions. I agree that there are difficulties because so many people bring their homes with them, but there are purpose-built chalets on some sites. We have heard quite a bit of evidence that modifications and alterations were carried out without consultation. Work needs to be done to ensure that such accommodation is brought up to standard and that the people who use it are consulted. As the convener said, people are keen to be consulted about adaptations.

The committee recommended the provision of community meeting facilities, particularly play areas for children and barrier-free and adapted amenity chalets for disabled Gypsy Travellers. However, we have heard differing views on how well the recommendation is being implemented. We have been told that provision has not improved in some areas and that people have difficulty in getting adaptations. Does the Executive monitor the delivery of such facilities? If a lack of resources at local authority level is a problem, will the funding that you announced today help?

Johann Lamont: We want to talk to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about how best to release the money that I have announced. As I said, a prerequisite for release will be evidence of consultation with Gypsy Travellers about what is needed. The first tranche of money will be directed at improving existing sites, because by the time planning permission is granted, the situation will be further along, so consideration will be given to how sites should be improved and to the priorities for improvements. I am sure that the concerns that you flag up will be addressed in that way.

I note your comments about the review of sites and perhaps we could undertake to discuss that matter with COSLA, too.

Marilyn Livingstone: I welcome your comments, because there seems to be huge variance around the country in the ease of securing help, particularly with aids and adaptations for disabled Travellers.

In its 2001 report, the committee recommended that local authorities carry out

"local needs assessment for Gypsy Traveller accommodation".

In a letter to the convener of the Communities Committee, the Minister for Communities noted that by April 2004

"Many councils identified a requirement to do more work to assess the needs of Gypsies/Travellers in their areas and were setting up or involved in local multi-agency working groups to begin this process."

The minister went on to say that meetings that were to be held in 2005 would

"provide an opportunity to flag up to councils the importance of making progress on Gypsy/Traveller accommodation needs."

The Equal Opportunities Committee and the Gypsy Traveller community are concerned about the lack of progress.

Johann Lamont: I recognise that there are issues to do with progress on a range of matters, as I think I said. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires councils to prepare proper local housing strategies and in so doing to address equality issues. Such strategies are the proper place to address the matter. The first local housing strategies have been submitted to Communities Scotland for assessment and many councils have identified a need to do more work on Gypsy Traveller accommodation. Communities Scotland area offices will meet councils from July 2005 to monitor local housing strategy action plans. That will provide an opportunity to flag up the importance of making progress on assessing Gypsy Traveller accommodation needs. I would certainly be happy to ask Communities Scotland to flag up any emerging issues or patterns.

The 2001 act also provides powers to issue guidance on the provision of accommodation for Gypsy Travellers and we plan to issue guidance when there is sufficient evidence of good practice. Again, that will be about dialogue with local authorities through Communities Scotland.

10:30

Marilyn Livingstone: I welcome that answer, minister. It will go a long way towards alleviating concerns.

In written evidence, the Traveller Education and Information Project (North East) noted that it believes that there is a real weakness in the Executive's decision to devolve responsibility for implementation to the local level. The TEIP believes that because the community is itinerant it will continue to experience prejudice and discrimination and—if implementation is left to the local level—that populist positions and nimbysism would prevail. What is the minister's comment on that view?

Johann Lamont: It depends on how you look at things. Although we set our education system in a

national context with national priorities, I am absolutely committed to local authority-level delivery. Local authorities are democratically accountable and they can be challenged. It is at local level that we have the capacity to deliver properly.

I do not accept that local authority services are more under pressure from nimbys or hostile or racist people. Indeed, if they are under such pressure, it is incumbent upon local authorities to resist that pressure through the quality of the services that they deliver. Education, in particular, is a universal right, but I believe that it is best delivered at a local level and the local authorities understand the responsibilities that go with that. They are also in partnership with Government at a Scotland level. It is not that we abandon responsibility to those working at a local level, or that we pull responsibility to the centre. It is about what works and understanding the challenges and responsibilities through dialogue between all levels of Government.

Marilyn Livingstone: Thank you for that answer. I agree that we want to leave as many delivery issues as possible to those at local level because that is where services can be properly delivered to meet local needs. However, we thought that it was important to ask you the question since we were given that view by a group of people who are deeply involved with Gypsy Travellers. I am really pleased with your answer.

Johann Lamont: That is not to say that the concerns and issues that have been flagged up are not taken seriously. It would be a major concern if it was implied that it is more likely that the quality of education given to the children of Gypsies and Travellers is reduced because local authorities are responsible for it. However, the challenge is about the quality of the service and how it is delivered, rather than whether it is good or bad because it is delivered at a local level.

Marilyn Livingstone: Another key recommendation was that, for the purposes of legislation, the definition of "home" should be reconsidered to include sites that are home to Gypsy Travellers who pay rent and council tax to live on them. That would bring sites under the same regime as mainstream social housing and solve several problems. Do you have any plans to address that, perhaps via the current Housing (Scotland) Bill?

Johann Lamont: It is apposite that the stage 1 report on the Housing (Scotland) Bill will be published tomorrow. In Scottish housing legislation, the term "house" is used rather than the term "home". In the Housing (Scotland) Bill a house is defined as

"any living accommodation ... occupied as a separate dwelling".

That definition specifically excludes mobile homes or

“other living accommodation which is not a building”.

I know that the Communities Committee has flagged that up in its stage 1 report on the bill but, as far as I am aware, it has not come to a conclusion. However, as the bill completes its passage, there will be an opportunity to explore the issue further.

We are not aware of any statutory definition of home in Scottish housing legislation. The term that is used and defined is “house” and the definition varies slightly according to the purpose of the provisions of the act. We have to decide whether it is about changing our definition of a house, or whether we consider properly the needs of people who do not usually live in houses. We do not have to change the definition of a house in order to address the pressing needs of Gypsies and Travellers, who may live in houses at some times and not at others. I am not saying that we are not concerned about the issue, but we need to consider how best to address it.

Marilyn Livingstone: Inspector Ian Taggart of Grampian Police stated in evidence:

“If the needs of the Traveller community were being met, there would not be unauthorised sites; we would have well-managed official sites that they would use.”—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee, 25 May 2005; c 962.*]

In your view, why are the Traveller community's needs not being met? What further action can the Executive take to ensure that they are met?

Johann Lamont: The quality of the sites that are available and access to those sites are issues. There needs to be consultation on what is needed from sites. I understand that having transit sites is being considered; we will have to explore some of the complexities of that. We need to examine the quality of sites and to work with communities on what they should look like and where they should be. We should be confident that, where there is organised provision, people are comfortable with that. We must also consider whether people are experiencing underlying hostility and racism. We do not agree that that problem would be solved if sites were okay. As well as providing sites, we must challenge attitudes that take people beyond behaviour towards and feelings about Gypsy Travellers that are based simply on the fact they are on an unauthorised site.

There are two different issues. It is important that we raise awareness, challenge attitudes and celebrate the diversity of cultures across Scotland, including the culture of Gypsies and Travellers. As I said in my opening statement, we must put in context what Gypsy Travellers bring to Scottish society before saying that there are issues relating

to camps, instead of saying that when we talk about Gypsy Travellers, we are talking about camps. There is the issue of sites: where they are, how good they are and why there are difficulties relating to them; and there is the related issue of the hostility that people experience because of their ethnicity.

Marilyn Livingstone: When we took evidence, we were struck by the fact that there is good practice and that good work is being done. When the short-life strategic group starts its work, will it be able to consider examples of best practice and good relationships with the community? I refer to cases in which barriers have been broken down and schooling is not an issue.

Johann Lamont: The group could certainly look at examples of best practice. I recognise that the original inquiry that the Equal Opportunities Committee carried out was important and that this follow-up inquiry has provided an opportunity for people to raise concerns, anxieties and difficulties, and for us all, including the Executive, to be challenged. However, I do not want us to have a philosophy of doom or to say that everything is an absolute disaster and that there are no people in Scotland committed to addressing the needs of Gypsy Travellers and to working alongside them to deal with difficulties.

Progress is being made, although there needs to be more. If there is good practice, we should recognise it. We do not need to be defensive or confrontational, but we must be challenged and challenging when taking issues forward. It is about the “One Scotland. Many Cultures” campaign, about provision and about thinking out of the box on education. It is good that progress is being made on health. I do not want people to despair or to think that nothing has happened. Perhaps not enough has happened, but that is a challenge rather than a reproach.

I agree with the suggestion that Marilyn Livingstone has made. As well as identifying difficulties, the short-life strategic group should identify measures that have worked and consider how further progress may be made. We must try to energise the commitment that resulted from the 2001 report.

Marilyn Livingstone: That is why I thought that it was important to make that point. The nature of our work brings out the issues. It strikes us that much good work takes place and that much commitment is shown throughout Scotland. If the short-life strategic group can take that on board, that would be very helpful.

Johann Lamont: Many of us in Parliament are committed to women's rights and to equality in general, so our role is to challenge, to be tough and to talk about difficult matters and make people

accept things and move matters on. We recognise that there is a shared commitment to address the issue and to challenge those who do not want that shared commitment; opposition to that commitment has expressed itself in the hostility reflected in some of the evidence that has come to the committee.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): My first question is on law reform; it arises from impatience with the usual process. I would not like to think that the strategic group that you talk about might be seen as yet another delaying tactic. That worries me.

Andrew Ryder of the Gypsy and Traveller law reform coalition told us in his evidence to the committee that there was broad support in England—including from the CRE, the Local Government Association and the Association of Chief Police Officers—for a statutory duty on councils to provide sites and for a forthcoming legal obligation on councils to identify land that Travellers can buy. Does the Executive have any plans to introduce such a duty in Scotland, perhaps through the forthcoming planning bill? I am concerned that instead of leading the way, Scotland might be left behind.

Johann Lamont: That is always a challenge. The Scottish Executive is aware of the work that is being done in Scotland by the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition. As members will know, it has been given a grant to draft a Scottish Traveller law reform bill. Andrew Ryder met with officials from the equality unit and the planning division to be briefed on Scottish Executive policies on Gypsy Travellers.

It is apposite that a ministerial statement on planning will be made this week. There are no plans to do as Marlyn Glen suggests but, given that there is a white paper, the issue could be flagged up and explored further. I recognise the anxieties that you mention about not being left behind and the need to take appropriate measures to create the kind of urgency that you highlight. The intention is not for the strategic group to be a stalling mechanism. I would not have agreed to it being established if that were the case. To me, the strategic group is an opportunity to capture the energy that is around some of the inquiry and say “Look, this gives this a focus. What are the key things that we could address quickly, shortly and sharply through the current processes that are coming through the Executive?” The timescale for the group would allow some issues, particularly around planning, to come through quickly.

Marlyn Glen: Will the law reform coalition be involved with the strategic group?

Johann Lamont: That is one of the issues that we need to consider further. We have not worked

out exactly who the appropriate groups would be to be involved with the strategic group. What we have said is that Gypsy Travellers would need to be represented on it. We will reflect on that suggestion.

Marlyn Glen: My next questions are on education. The Scottish Traveller Education Programme—STEP—highlights a worrying issue in its 2004 report:

“the treatment of Gypsy/Traveller pupils, particularly from pupils who bully and call them racist names, is a well recognised source of concern to Gypsy/Traveller parents that discourages attendance at school Of particular concern is that young Gypsy/Travellers are not believed by their teachers when they legitimately complain of such treatment”.

Pauline Padfield of STEP additionally points out in evidence to the committee that many Gypsy Traveller children are successful in school because they conceal their identity. That is a concern. It is clear that putting money into the anti-bullying network is not solving the problem. As we have said, without legal recognition of their status Gypsy Travellers do not benefit from the same protection under the law as other minority groups, including other groups of Travellers. What will the Executive do to ensure that that specific issue is addressed effectively?

10:45

Johann Lamont: There are two elements. We have discussed the overarching legislative commitment to act against discrimination and the idea of identification as an ethnic minority, which I understand the drive for. However, that does not mean that nothing can be done on bullying issues. Although we have an anti-bullying network, we still have bullying in all sorts of forms in schools. That remains a constant and hard challenge that is a pressure on those who are involved in education and who have children in education—children who are being bullied, those who are bullies and those who stand at the side and watch.

A huge issue is educating the educators and continuing the pressure to understand the difficulties that particular youngsters face. The general position on bullying is that young people must be listened to. I know from my experience that young people are still told to stop telling tales and to go back and sit down; that is low-level stuff. We know that that remains, despite the best endeavours and the policies, so we must challenge educators on understanding and listening to young people. That applies to young Gypsy Traveller children, too.

Educators must be tuned into the way in which bullying can express itself. If Gypsy Traveller children have a particular experience, that must be taken account of. We must find a way to ensure

that those who are responsible for addressing bullying in schools listen to that.

Schools must have the support service for youngsters who have stopped going to school for a range of reasons to tune into the fact that that might be a particular experience of that group. Although Scottish Gypsy Travellers are not identified as an ethnic minority in law, if a child has that experience because of where they stay, we must ask what is being done about that locally. How open are schools to families to talk about the issue, so that they do not feel that it would be best to keep children away? As you say, it is worrying if children conceal where they come from. Other youngsters in school also hide what has happened to them at home and cannot talk about their experience at home because other things would happen to them as a consequence.

All sorts of minorities and youngsters who are seen to be vulnerable and who are victimised have general experiences of bullying that our anti-bullying strategy must address. I know that schools and others are working on that. They are in a hard place to be. In particular, schools must be sensitive to the issues that relate to young Gypsy Travellers. We should ask local authorities to talk about that in a cross-cutting way with education services and down into schools.

If the United Kingdom Government sorted out the legal bit, Gypsy Travellers would have legal protection, but it is how that is expressed locally through all the strategies that are available through education authorities and elsewhere that would change the experience of youngsters in classes, the quality of their education and their capacity to stay there without feeling that they must hide anything. That is not an either/or situation.

Other factors are the broader issue of tolerance, anti-racism work, our commitment to the one Scotland, many cultures campaign and the capacity to celebrate different cultures. Schools do that a bit, but perhaps we have a bit of a tick-box mentality to the cultures that we celebrate. We must recognise diversity and use it.

In Glasgow, ex-colleagues of mine who work with many asylum seeker and refugee children are beginning to draw in a positive way on the experience of youngsters who have ended up in Castlemilk from Russia, via many stops in between. I have seen that that has the capacity to open the eyes of all the youngsters in a class. We must take such a view of all our ethnic minorities. That understanding begins to challenge some hostilities. It also presents such youngsters as a positive force in a school. Their culture is something positive that they bring to the table, rather than something that they must hide.

Marlyn Glen: I thank the minister for that full answer. The feeling that I got when Gypsy Travellers gave evidence was that it is frustrating for Gypsy Traveller families to see all that movement with new people coming into schools when Gypsy Travellers have been with us for a long time. The situation has lasted for such a long time that they find it difficult to stand up to.

I have a question on the curriculum. Another issue that reportedly acts as a barrier to the attendance of Gypsy Traveller children in mainstream secondary education is the perceived lack of relevance of the curriculum to their lives. The STEP report notes:

“there is an overall lack of official knowledge and understanding of Gypsy/Travellers and the cultural and social realities of their ... lives”.

What, if anything, is the Executive planning to do to ensure the relevance of our school curriculum to all our young citizens and specifically to Gypsy Travellers, who, as we heard in evidence, are still severely excluded?

Johann Lamont: Obviously, the matter is one for the Education Department. That said, I am more than happy to raise the specific issues that relate to the curriculum with the Minister for Education and Young People.

The challenge for the curriculum is for it to be relevant to any 15 year-old—I say that having been there. There is a tension between the need to have a curriculum and for it to place in context all our experiences. When we go to school, teachers need to talk about things that are relevant to us all. In order that they do not feel excluded, children and young people need to feel that their history and culture is important. I take the point that Marlyn Glen makes about asylum seekers and refugees. We need to find out how to learn more about it. As I said earlier, we need to see how we can better use “fair for all” as a resource.

If a child or young person feels excluded in school, we have to address that. It would be interesting to discover how education would change as a result of dialogue with Gypsy Travellers as part of our commitment to increased communication. I hope that the Education Department will take up the matter. It is important that schools have the capacity to help children and young people to reach their full potential. The area is one that the Executive would want to explore further.

Ms White: One of the STEP recommendations is that inclusive approaches should be taken to education. When the Executive approached local authorities, only 25 per cent of schools came back with an answer. The minister said that new research was being commissioned on the need to

promote the education interests of Gypsy Travellers. Do you have a date by which it will be complete?

Johann Lamont: I will get that information to the committee.

The Convener: Okay. That would be helpful.

Marlyn Glen: My next question may also be one for the Education Department. It underlines the fact that Executive departments need to work together. The STEP 2004 report, which was funded by the Scottish Executive, made two key recommendations with regard to information and communications technology. First, that

"More concerted efforts should be directed towards using the potential of ICT for supporting learning at a distance and for transference of pupil records."

And secondly, that

"The Scottish Executive should take a lead in developments towards ensuring that teachers be *provided* with resources and training for using ICT in supporting learning at a distance."

What is the Scottish Executive doing in response to those particular recommendations?

Johann Lamont: I will come back to the committee with a response on the detail of the ICT point. The recommendation makes perfect sense to me but it is not an area on which I have great detail.

STEP is an important resource for the Executive. It continues to support the education sector by maintaining its website, which contains relevant information, resources and research reports and a resource library that contains teaching material for the school sector. I would be interested in—and I will clarify for the committee—the extent to which people are directed towards that work.

In autumn 2005, STEP will launch two leaflets and an associated DVD on education in Scotland that is aimed at Gypsy Traveller parents and families. The first leaflet will contain targeted information on the education system and the second will contain issues around being safe in school. STEP will continue to monitor policy developments in the field and maintain professional relationships within the educational context. STEP's work is important.

Marlyn Glen: My last question also focuses on education. What if anything, is the Executive doing to ensure that the success of existing good practice in terms of alternative education provision for Gypsy Travellers is shared across the education authorities in Scotland and further developed to improve provision for the target community?

Johann Lamont: STEP has produced and disseminated three case studies on schools in

Fife, Highland and South Lanarkshire. Those studies considered how staff and schools worked with Gypsy Travellers to overcome the practical constraints in the education system. The Fife case study received a nomination in this year's Scottish education awards. That is one wee area and I will come back to you with other information.

Marlyn Glen: I attended the conference that you talked about earlier. Although part of the reason for that was to disseminate good practice, I did not think that it was streamlined and focused enough to do so. I will be interested to see what the conference report is like.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I have some questions about health issues among Gypsy Travellers. At the beginning of June, Michelle Lloyd of Save the Children expressed her disappointment that although the national hand-held health record had been produced at the end of last year, it had not yet been launched. In an answer to a parliamentary question just after that, Rhona Brankin said that the launch would be in July. You mentioned that guidance is soon to be issued to health boards about how to use the records, so can I presume that the records themselves will follow hard on the heels of that guidance?

Johann Lamont: I expect so. Guidance on the hand-held health record will be issued to NHS boards in early July and that will be followed by training in raising awareness about Gypsy Traveller health issues and use of the records.

Nora Radcliffe: Is that all being delivered by the Gypsy Traveller community development project in Glasgow?

Johann Lamont: Yes.

Nora Radcliffe: Will that group be used to do that work across Scotland?

Lesley Irving: Yes, a rolling programme will run over two years and we will carry out the training at various locations across Scotland. Importantly, we will be involving local partners from Gypsy Traveller communities in various parts of Scotland in order to ensure that the training is representative of the needs of Gypsy Travellers.

Johann Lamont: It might be worth saying that the national resource centre for ethnic minority health is currently undertaking a health needs assessment for Gypsy Travellers in Scotland, which will help to guide future work.

Nora Radcliffe: You are answering many of the questions that I was going to ask. Particular concerns were raised about the health needs of male Gypsy Travellers and pregnant women. However, all of that will be picked up in the needs assessment. I presume that the good practice guidance to public bodies will include health

issues and encompass what health boards' work will include.

Johann Lamont: Certainly, all NHS boards have a fair for all plan and a race equality scheme, which is constantly evolving to deliver culturally competent services and to understand people's needs properly.

Nora Radcliffe: Obviously, that will all be enforced through the training and awareness-raising work that will go on around the hand-held health records, particularly in relation to health boards. It sounds as though progress is being made. I think that the tone of today's exchange will be comforting to people who are watching it.

Marlyn Glen: The committee has heard about good work that is being done at the top level in the police in certain force areas to work constructively with the Gypsy Traveller community. However, we are also still hearing about examples of unacceptable attitudes and approaches that would not be tolerated if they were taken to other ethnic minority groups. How is the Executive working with the police to ensure that the right messages are reaching all levels within the police forces across Scotland?

Johann Lamont: The way the police work with communities, respond to them and address their concerns about discrimination against them is important. I do not have the details of specific programmes that are being rolled out through the Justice Department, but I could come back to the committee on that. There is no doubt that the Scottish Executive has shown a commitment to, and an understanding of, the needs of groups who are targeted and discriminated against, but it would be best if I were to get back to you on how that is interpreted in terms of training for police in relation to Gypsy Travellers.

Marlyn Glen: Thank you for that. The Commission for Racial Equality and the Scottish Human Rights Centre have expressed concerns about the Executive's "Guidelines for Managing Unauthorised Camping by Gypsies/Travellers" of 2004. The CRE noted that it should be part of an overarching national approach to Gypsy Travellers and the SHRC stated:

"If the language in the guidelines was used about any other ethnic minority community, you would have a riot on your hands."—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 12 April 2005; c888.]

The SHRC also expressed regret that the Executive ignored most of the positive consultation responses that it received. Does the Executive have any plans to develop an overall strategy on Gypsy Travellers, and are there any plans to review and perhaps to adapt the language in the guidelines?

11:00

Johann Lamont: That is an important issue on which we would have to reflect. As I said in my opening statement, issuing guidelines on unauthorised encampments on its own creates the impression that there is a problem that has to be addressed, even if action were taken with good intentions. The guidelines need to be put in the proper context, which is one of the things that we want to develop further. The guidelines were drafted by a working group that included representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. The guidelines were widely distributed for consultation, including among Gypsy Travellers, prior to their publication. We recognised that unauthorised camping requires sensitive and proportionate handling by all concerned and that it can be a difficult issue to resolve.

As Marlyn Glen said, there has been a reaction to the guidelines; some responses were more measured than others, but they were all genuinely felt. We have to take on board, and reflect on, the fact that some Gypsies and Travellers and Gypsy Traveller agencies feel that the guidelines contain inflammatory and racist language. We do not plan to review the guidelines but, as I said, it is important that we ensure that they are part of a wider and more positive Executive strategy on Gypsy Traveller issues. It may be that, through the short-life strategic group, we should be considering why the guidelines provoked the reaction that they did and how we can address that.

Marlyn Glen: I would be more confident if you were to consider the matter in detail to see whether you should adapt the language in the guidelines. For how long would such guidelines be left for people to use?

Johann Lamont: I accept that. Whatever the intention, if the consequence is that people are concerned, the matter must be considered. If in rebuilding and restoring confidence in our approach people have identified a problem with the guidelines, we must consider that. We are clear that the future accommodation needs of Gypsy Travellers should be addressed as part of the process of preparing community and other relevant statutory plans, such as local housing strategies. It is important that we pluck the guidelines out of a range of policy areas and put them back in their context. We have to deal with the issues that created some of the challenges.

Nora Radcliffe: Among the concerns about the guidelines that was flagged up to us was that the limit on the tolerable number of vehicles in the guidelines about unauthorised camping militated against family groups' travelling together. You

might want to consider that practical issue when you consider the guidelines.

Johann Lamont: Okay.

Marilyn Livingstone: I have a question about promoting good relations. I talked to you earlier about good practice—some of the work that is going on with Save the Children falls into that category. When we met young people and representatives of Save the Children we were all impressed by the work that it is doing. In its evidence to the committee, Save the Children expressed disappointment that Gypsy Travellers were not included in the one Scotland, many cultures campaign. It stated:

“Although such an advert would not have alleviated discrimination overnight, it would have sent out a powerful visible message that discrimination against Gypsy Travellers is not only unacceptable but potentially unlawful.”

Do you have any plans for further such campaigns, which could include Gypsy Travellers?

Johann Lamont: The third phase of the one Scotland, many cultures anti-racism campaign was launched on 10 February 2005; it includes television, bus and radio advertising. Although the advertising and the activities around it did not focus specifically on Gypsy Travellers, the message that the campaign is trying to convey applies to all minority groups, visible or otherwise. That message is that racist attitudes or actions, whomsoever they are directed at, are unacceptable, cause offence and have consequences. We ought not to be judging people by their ethnicity, their cultural commitments and so on. There is a general message about the kind of Scotland that we want to live in. We will all be better for it if we succeed in getting that message across. I believe that Gypsy Travellers are encompassed within that message.

The one Scotland and Young Scot websites have information about Gypsy Travellers, including stories about their experiences. The one Scotland website content is being reviewed and we will take the opportunity to consider the content on Gypsy Travellers. That is another area that we can be informed by Gypsy Travellers themselves.

Representatives of the Gypsy Traveller community and Save the Children were consulted on the development and content of the Young Scot website; we would be happy to continue that dialogue. In the coming period, we must also consider the use of positive images in partnership with Gypsy Travellers. There is a strong and hard message about how we treat each other and how we respect and value our cultural diversity, but there is also a message about how we celebrate and understand that diversity. The campaign has complementary aspects and we should be weaving Gypsy Travellers into that.

The Convener: We would welcome that because there is almost a sense that Gypsy Travellers are fair game and the press will print stories about them that it would not print about any other section of our community. It would make a lot of sense to celebrate Gypsy Travellers' hundreds of years of tradition and the fact that they are an integral part of Scotland's tradition, as would recognising them as being indigenous to Scotland. It is good that such information is on the websites that have been mentioned and it would be good if other publicity work was done to highlight that Gypsy Travellers did not arrive from the moon but have probably been here longer than many of us.

Ms White: On what Marilyn Livingstone and the convener said about the adverse reaction that people—particularly the media—have to Gypsy Travellers, we also have the evidence of Inspector Taggart of Grampian police. He told the committee how racist attacks in his area had increased and become really severe, particularly following negative reporting in the local media. We also have the evidence of the young people who have really suffered, and who feel that 79 per cent of the adverse media coverage comes from one particular newspaper. We see headlines such as

“Gipsies in Land ‘Grab’ Demand”

it brings us back to what the convener was saying. How do we stop such negative reporting? If such reporting occurred in respect of any other minority group, the Race Relations Act 1976 could be used against the newspaper, but Gypsy Travellers in Scotland do not have that luxury, if I might call it that. What is the Executive doing to combat prejudice against Gypsy Travellers, particularly in the media? That example has been reported to the Press Complaints Commission, but if people are not covered by the Race Relations Act 1976—although the Equality Bill is going through Westminster—they do not have much protection. People could bring legal actions if they were protected, so what is the Executive doing about that?

The convener and others asked whether we could make representations to Westminster to have those issues included in the Equality Bill, and you replied that a twin-track approach is being taken. What exactly is the Executive doing to stop Gypsy Travellers and other ethnic minority groups from suffering such negative reporting among certain parts of the media?

Johann Lamont: It is possible that other ethnic minority groups that are covered by race relations legislation would contend that, in some cases, the legislation has not afforded them any greater protection from horrendous headlines in the press. In some places, our press is irresponsible and almost unaware of its power. There is an issue

about responsible reporting and the press must consider the consequences of continually winding up people and cranking up the situation in communities. I do not know whether the committee took evidence from journalists or representatives of the press, but I would be interested to hear the profession's view on its responsibilities. The profession is best placed to tell us about its codes of practice on such matters and I would be happy to have a dialogue with it.

I understand the point about legal protection and I am not suggesting that it is not important. If there was evidence that Scottish Gypsy Travellers' experiences were the direct consequence of press coverage, we might expect that a case would end up in court and that it would be established that Gypsy Travellers are an ethnic minority and should not suffer discrimination. However, legal protection in itself is not enough; we must challenge the people who report irresponsibly and the people who are cranked up and who generate the reports in the press. We must consider a range of matters. Where does the hostility come from? Why do some people not want to live in a diverse Scotland, in a society in which there can be mutual respect? What are the reasons for difficulties in challenging people's attitudes? How can there be dialogue between communities? Such issues are the template for much of our work on equalities, which is to do not just with working together and sharing but with challenging people. We can win hearts in the long term, but in the short term people need to know that hostility, racism and bullying are unacceptable.

That is the bigger picture and it relates to my comments about schools. The challenge is not just for people who work in the media, but for the communities that respond to media coverage and behave in certain ways. The challenge involves the bringing together of many aspects, including education and enforcement.

Ms White: I agree that the press should act responsibly. However, there is evidence that racist attacks increased during press coverage of Gypsy Travellers, particularly in the Aberdeen area, where young kids were stoned and caravans were smashed up. As you suggested, protection in law does not always mean protection in practice, as other ethnic minority groups might confirm. However, some groups have the law on their side and can take legal action.

I do not want to be all doom and gloom. Although we heard evidence that not an awful lot has moved on during the four years since the committee produced its report, the projects, money and careful consideration of the situation that the minister announced today give us hope. Just as the media must act responsibly, the Executive and politicians in Scotland must take a

positive stance. Marilyn Livingstone mentioned the one Scotland, many cultures campaign. When will the Executive initiate a similar campaign to support Gypsy Travellers? Attacks on the Gypsy population seem to be on the increase and people feel frustrated that nothing has moved on. What will the Executive do to show leadership and push forward the committee's recommendations?

Johann Lamont: The press must be accountable and responsible for how it reports issues and it should reflect on the comments of the committee and others about the consequences of its reports. I have not seen the evidence, but Sandra White obviously has a view on the matter. The press must be accountable for its professional standards and must be able to justify itself—the Government cannot intervene and say, "You will report this, but not that." There is also an issue about accountability and responsibility under the law. People must understand the law; I accept the point that was made about the legal position.

The Equal Opportunities Committee's report was important. Many things have been done, but many more things have to be done. The committee's consideration represents an important staging post at which we can reflect on the matter, prevent it from drifting and give it more energy, but it is not fair to say that nothing has happened, that hostility is increasing and that problems have greatly increased. If those are people's perceptions, however we must address them, too.

It is important that we do not regard Gypsy Travellers as being a particular problem that must be addressed, but the experiences Gypsy Travellers describe are a challenge that must be addressed in the context of our commitment to the one Scotland, many cultures approach, to understanding and appreciating cultural diversity and to challenging all those who wish to separate people, to emphasise their differences and to treat them differently on the basis that it is legitimate to discriminate against them. It is important that we place the issue in the context of our wider approach to equalities, instead of regarding it as something odd and peculiar that has come from the moon, as the convener put it. It has not, but it is an issue.

11:15

Through the short-life strategic group, we can focus on the hard issues that have been raised with the committee and we can re-examine how discrimination expresses itself in a particular way towards Gypsy Travellers. That knowledge will make our equalities strategy sharper, more sophisticated and more targeted. We can use it as part of our broader strategies in education and health in order that we can meet people's needs. We must talk to the people who have needs about

how those needs can best be expressed. The aim is to sensitise the good practice that we are beginning to develop in a range of areas across the Executive to the experiences of Gypsy Travellers. The part of the Executive that deals with equalities can lead by asking what we are doing across our legislative horizon and whether this is a specific and sensitive blip that we recognise now but did not recognise previously. When we address broader equality and race equality issues, we should also tune into the issues that are faced by Gypsy Travellers. I commit to that on behalf of the communities portfolio.

There are hard questions that we can ask, and we will come back to the committee on issues relating to education and justice. We must also underline the fact that there are particular experiences of discrimination in Gypsy Traveller communities, to which we must find particular solutions. However, there is a broader context. As I said in my opening statement, we have isolated one particular problem by not placing it in the broader context of the contribution that Gypsy Travellers make. By recognising that, we have taken an important step forward.

The Convener: The committee does not want in four years' time to have to conduct another inquiry into what has happened in this area and into difficulties that still exist. We are anxious to move forward. Thank you for your evidence this morning. I am pleased to hear about the work that the Executive is doing to help us to move forward together.

Disability Inquiry

11:17

The Convener: Agenda item 2 relates to the committee's disability inquiry. The paper that is before us provides us with a summary of evidence and proposes action to progress the inquiry. Are members happy with the paper?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will have an opportunity to discuss the paper in more detail after the summer recess. Do members agree to the recommendations that are set out in paragraph 6 of the paper?

Members indicated agreement.

Meeting closed at 11:18.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Wednesday 6 July 2005

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by Astron and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop
53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222

Blackwell's Bookshops:
243-244 High Holborn
London WC1 7DZ
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh

Blackwell's Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament, their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

E-mail orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Subscriptions & Standing Orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

RNID Typetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5412
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers

Printed in Scotland by Astron