

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 6 March 2007

Session 2

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

5th Meeting 2007, Session 2

CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP)

*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

*Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Frances Curran (Central Scotland) (SSP)

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Zoé Tough

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 6 March 2007

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:05*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Cathy Peattie): Good morning. I open the fifth meeting in 2007 of the Equal Opportunities Committee and I remind all present—including members—that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be turned off completely as they interfere with the sound system even when switched to silent. I have received apologies for absence from Carolyn Leckie, John Swinburne, Margaret Smith and Jamie McGrigor.

Under agenda item 1, we must consider whether to take agenda item 4, on the committee's draft legacy paper, in private. Do members agree that we should take item 4 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

European Year of Equal Opportunities for All 2007

10:05

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is the report of my visit to Berlin for the launch of the European year of equal opportunities for all. Do members have any comments?

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I agree with the recommendation that we should monitor events and activities. That would be valuable.

The Convener: It certainly would.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Your report is very good, convener, as is the publication from the conference in Berlin, which contains some very interesting stuff.

I am concerned to note that there will be no launch in Scotland—you highlight that point in your report. Have projects already started in other countries in the United Kingdom or elsewhere?

The Convener: They have certainly started in other countries. Later this month, I will attend a meeting to consider a Scottish launch for the European year of equal opportunities for all. I hope that our successor committee will be able to monitor what happens during the year.

The UK—and clearly Scotland—has been very slow in making progress on the year. If members read the publication from the launch they will see lots of parallels with work that we have done in the Scottish Parliament, so it is a great pity that we have been a bit slow to get moving. We have a good story to tell and a number of issues to highlight. It would be a pity to miss out on this year and not be able to do something.

Ms White: The convener, the clerks and other committee members have done a lot of work, but we do not know what is happening UK-wide, or Scotland-wide. Will we receive feedback if there is a UK launch? Obviously, the committee will be finishing up shortly and will no longer be meeting.

The Convener: We will be looking at Scottish events and at what can be done in Scotland in the European year of equal opportunities for all. We can also monitor what is happening in the rest of the UK. As I said, there will be a meeting later this month.

Ms White: Will the committee meet after that meeting? Will we receive feedback?

The Convener: Yes, the committee will meet after that meeting and outcomes will be fed back to members. At the meeting, I will make strong representations and recommendations on behalf of the committee. There are things that we have to

do in Scotland to make progress during the European year.

Ms White: I look forward to hearing about the meeting.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I like the idea that the European year is a year of equal opportunities for all and not just for one equalities strand. That ties in with the idea of mainstreaming and the ideas of the commission for equality and human rights.

We have done a lot of work on disability during this session of the Parliament, but it would be nice next session if the Equal Opportunities Committee could pick up on our ideas but concentrate more on mainstreaming.

The Convener: That would be valuable. Members will recall that our work on disability during this session emerged from the European year of disabled people. It would therefore make sense if this year we considered wider equalities issues. We should consider issues right across the board and look into mainstreaming.

I was struck by the number of different organisations at the conference in Berlin, and by the number of different interests that were represented. I was heartened to learn that lots of things were happening in Europe, and even more heartened to realise that in Scotland we are ahead of the game in some areas. We want to keep up the momentum.

Ms White: I am looking through your report page by page. At point 7, under the heading "Conference opening", you say that the

"German Federal Minister for Family Affairs ... highlighted"

the fact that

"large numbers of immigrants have provided a huge opportunity for Germany".

Was that point elaborated on?

The Convener: It was pointed out that immigration has had a positive effect on economic growth in Germany. A new workforce has brought new skills. The sentiments that were expressed by the minister were very positive.

Do members agree with the recommendations at the end of my report—paper EO.S2.07.05.01?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I will report back to the committee after the meeting later this month.

Commission for Equality and Human Rights

10:10

The Convener: Agenda item 3 concerns the commission for equality and human rights. We have received a letter from the equalities co-ordinating group expressing concern at the lack of representation of Scotland and Wales on the senior management team and in the currently proposed structure of the organisation. Do members have any comments?

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): In previous discussions, the committee has been concerned about that lack of representation. I therefore join the equalities co-ordinating group in expressing deep concerns. As a powerful committee of this Parliament, we should look into what action we can take.

Ms White: I agree with Elaine Smith. The committee has expressed its concerns, particularly over there being no commissioner specific to Scotland. We have wondered how Scotland's case would be put across in a UK-wide commission. We should say in the strongest terms that we want clarification of whether there will be Scottish representation. Scotland must not be left behind without any input.

As you said, convener, we have made progress in Scotland. I would not like us to take a step backwards as a result of having no direct input into the commission. The committee must therefore express its view, perhaps in a letter.

Marilyn Livingstone: When I think of all the work that has been put in, it is disappointing to say the least that the ECG has had to highlight that the arrangements for the CEHR are

"not adequately reflecting the importance and needs of Devolution within the core functional proposal".

The committee has expressed that very concern and we need to take strong action.

The Convener: The ECG raises a number of concerns, and this committee has taken evidence on the single equalities body. I agree with the ECG's point about the importance of taking full account of the devolution settlement and of the unique and successful way in which equalities organisations operate in Scotland. We have a strong relationship with equalities organisations and we would not want to move away from that.

Clearly, we would like the CEHR to succeed and to have a strong relationship with the Parliament and with stakeholders in Scotland. Final decisions are still to be taken on the structure of the CEHR, so the committee might wish to write to the CEHR

to request that further discussions take place in Scotland with stakeholders.

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Clearly, although we acknowledge that the structures have still to be finalised, we would urge that a Scottish representative have a distinctive role. We have highlighted such issues in the past, during deliberations on the CEHR. If the ECG is concerned and if people in Wales are concerned, it is our responsibility to re-emphasise our concerns.

Marlyn Glen: The Parliament held an equalities event not last Friday but the Friday before. Trevor Phillips was here at the Parliament, talking to us, so I would like to be able to say that I was convinced that we should not worry. However, in some way or another, I am not convinced. He came and he opened the event, but I am not sure whether he took all that much away. I would be keen for us to send a letter to him directly. We could ask the Minister for Communities to write to him as well. Would that be possible?

10:15

The Convener: We could do both. It was heartening that Trevor Phillips agreed to come up to the event and to hear what Scottish organisations had to say. My worry is that we have already raised our concerns during early work on the CEHR but that our concerns do not seem to have made a great deal of difference. We should write to Trevor Phillips and to the Minister for Communities, if members feel that that would be helpful. We have to have some kind of dialogue.

From our experience of setting up the Parliament, we know that when you start with a blank sheet of paper you can put in place the things that need to be put in place. However, once an organisation starts to move, putting things in place becomes harder. The time to try to make changes to the CEHR is now.

Elaine Smith: I agree. Can we highlight those points in the legacy paper to our successor committee?

The Convener: Yes, we have to do that.

Are members happy with the actions that have been proposed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We will now discuss in private our draft legacy paper to the successor Equal Opportunities Committee.

10:16

Meeting continued in private until 10:43.

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