

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 19 June 2007

Session 3

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2007, Session 3

OLDEST COMMITTEE MEMBER

*Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP)

*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)

*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

*Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 19 June 2007

[THE OLDEST COMMITTEE MEMBER *opened the meeting at 11:00*]

Interests

Sandra White (Oldest Committee Member): We begin right on time. I did not believe that I was the oldest committee member, so I asked for a recount; having looked at the results, I must now admit that I am. I will not say which member is the closest to me in age.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome everyone to the first meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee in the third session of the Scottish Parliament. I remind everyone, including members, to turn off their mobile phones and BlackBerrys, as they interfere with the sound system. We have received no apologies.

The first agenda item is declaration of interests. In accordance with section 3 of the code of conduct, I invite members to declare any interests that are relevant to the committee's remit. I will begin, and we will work round the table. I have no interests to declare.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): I have no interests to declare.

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I have no interests to declare.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I have no interests to declare.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I might have some relevant interests, so I will put them all on the record. I have registrable interests with regard to support that I received towards the passage of the Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Bill in the previous parliamentary session. I am a member of the General Teaching Council and the Transport and General Workers Union, and the convener of Scottish Labour's campaign for socialism.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): I have no interests to declare.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I have no interests to declare.

Convener

11:02

Sandra White: The second agenda item is the selection of a committee convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party are eligible for nomination as committee convener. That being the case, I seek nominations for the post.

Marlyn Glen: I nominate Margaret Mitchell.

Margaret Mitchell was chosen as convener.

The Convener (Margaret Mitchell): I thank Sandra White for very professionally conducting the opening proceedings. I also thank committee members for selecting me as convener.

The Equal Opportunities Committee is one of eight mandatory committees in the Scottish Parliament, and its remit often involves assessing and respecting competing interests and finding a balanced solution that promotes equal opportunities. I think that we are in for a very interesting, challenging and—I hope—rewarding time.

Deputy Convener

11:03

The Convener: The third agenda item is selection of a deputy convener. As members will see from the clerk's note, the procedure is very similar to that for selecting the convener.

The Parliament has agreed that members of the Labour Party are eligible for selection as deputy convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee. That being the case, I invite nominations for the post.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I nominate Elaine Smith.

Elaine Smith was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: I congratulate Elaine Smith on becoming deputy convener.

Work Programme

11:04

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is consideration of the development of the committee's work programme. The clerks have prepared a detailed paper, one option in which is that the committee hold an away day, at which we will be able to give proper consideration to the legacy paper from the Equal Opportunities Committee in the previous parliamentary session. Members have an opportunity to read the legacy paper—indeed, some members were members of the previous committee. I stress that the recommendations in the legacy paper are not binding on us. However, it provides a useful indication of the important work that was done by the previous committee. I invite comments from members.

Sandra White: I thank the clerks and the members of the previous session's Equal Opportunities Committee for their work. The legacy paper shows how much the committee achieved. I would welcome an away day, so that we can discuss whether we want to take up issues that are raised in the paper. For example, it would be a good idea to continue the practice of appointing reporters.

Elaine Smith: I thank the committee for installing me as deputy convener.

Like Sandra White, I thank the clerks. I have served on the Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee since 1999 and I think that an away day is a good idea. We can use the day to discuss in more depth the ideas in the legacy paper and other ideas.

Marlyn Glen: I echo that. An away day is necessary. I read the legacy paper with a fresh eye for the new session of the Parliament and I could find no suggestions that I thought that we should not follow up. That is worrying, because there is already quite a lot of work for the new committee, without our adding fresh ideas for the new session. We certainly need to discuss the paper in depth.

The Convener: There is a lot in the legacy paper. There seems to be a consensus in the committee that we would like to have an away day to discuss the issues fully. Would it suit members if we held the away day in late August, at the end of the summer recess? That would give new members a chance to be properly briefed.

We have received some suggestions from the clerks of people who could be invited to the away day, including the Minister for Communities and Sport. Of the reasons for inviting him, not the least would be to consider the important inquiry into

disability that the Equal Opportunities Committee held in the previous session. We might also invite other stakeholders who have previously provided useful background information on the issues that the committee will deal with over the coming months. Do members agree with those suggestions?

Members indicated agreement.

Hugh O'Donnell: Convener, could we be offered a range of options for the date of the away day, to ensure that there is no clash with alternative diary appointments that members may have?

The Convener: Yes. It would be helpful if members could confer with the clerks, indicating when they would not be available. Most members tend to leave the last week of August free—and free of holidays—so that they can catch up on work before the impending start of parliamentary business. The clerk, Steve Farrell, will e-mail members this week with some possible dates around that last week in August. Is that all right with members?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: One final point is the timing of our committee meetings. Our meetings will start at 11 o'clock on Tuesday mornings, if that meets with members' approval. However, we will start earlier if the business of the committee so requires—as it often will if, for example, we are taking evidence. Do members approve of that plan?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you. It remains only for me to thank members for their attendance. I look forward to seeing you all at the away day.

Sandra White: Thank you, and congratulations, convener.

The Convener: I close the very first meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee in this, the third session of the Scottish Parliament.

Meeting closed at 11:08.

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