

# **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 18 December 2007

Session 3

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2007.

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 RR  
Donnelley.

---

## CONTENTS

Tuesday 18 December 2007

Col.

DISABILITY INQUIRY .....	185
WORK PROGRAMME .....	211

---

### EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

#### † 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2007, Session 3

##### CONVENER

\*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

##### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

##### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)

\*Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP)

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

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

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

\*Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

##### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)

\*attended

##### THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Stewart Maxwell (Minister for Communities and Sport)

Yvonne Strachan (Scottish Government Public Health and Wellbeing Directorate)

Hilary Third (Scottish Government Public Health and Wellbeing Directorate)

##### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

##### ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

##### LOCATION

Committee Room 6

† 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2007, Session 3—held in private.



## Scottish Parliament

### Equal Opportunities Committee

*Tuesday 18 December 2007*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 11:04*]

### Disability Inquiry

**The Convener (Margaret Mitchell):** Welcome to the ninth meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee in session 3.

We have apologies from Sandra White, and Michael McMahon will join us a little later.

Under our first agenda item, we will take evidence from the Scottish Government on the implementation of the recommendations in our predecessor committee's disability inquiry report, which was a major piece of work. The inquiry lasted almost two-and-a-half years and the report, which contained more than 150 recommendations, was welcomed by the vast majority of disabled people and organisations that work with disabled people. It is not surprising that members of the current Equal Opportunities Committee are keen to ensure that our predecessors' good work is not lost. Therefore, we decided to take follow-up evidence from a range of Scottish ministers.

I am pleased to welcome the first minister from whom we will take evidence. Stewart Maxwell, the Minister for Communities and Sport, is accompanied by the head of the Scottish Government's equality unit, Yvonne Strachan, and the head of the disability and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender branch of the equality unit, Hilary Third. I invite the minister to make a brief opening statement.

**The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell):** Thank you for the promotion, convener. For clarity, I am not the First Minister, although I may be the first minister to appear before the committee to give evidence on the report.

**Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):** It is early days yet, minister.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Thank you very much, Hugh.

**The Convener:** I should probably say that the "first" that I mentioned had a small "f".

**Stewart Maxwell:** Thank you for inviting me to give evidence on how the Scottish Government is taking forward the recommendations in the previous committee's disability inquiry report.

I stress the Government's commitment to disability equality. We want a fair and equal

Scotland in which disabled people have choices, control, the opportunity to succeed and, of course, the opportunity to be all that they can be. Our focus is on mainstreaming and driving forward on the public sector equality duties, which I discussed with the committee earlier this month. We will do that in partnership with disabled people. The disability equality duty requires us to involve disabled people in the development of our disability equality scheme. We are committed to supporting and strengthening our engagement and involvement with disabled people.

The inquiry and its recommendations are important in helping us to identify areas in which action is needed to deliver disability equality. Government officials and ministers are aware of the report and are taking its recommendations on board. I confirm that I have written to my ministerial colleagues to remind them of it and to alert them to the committee's wish to engage with them in the new year. The report sits alongside other significant pieces of work that inform our approach to tackling the prejudice, discrimination and disadvantages that disabled people face. The Disability Rights Commission, for example, produced two substantial pieces of work earlier this year that are helping to shape our approach to disability: "The disability agenda: Creating an alternative future", which was produced in February; and a scoping study on independent living, which was produced in August.

The Scottish Government as an employer is committed to equality, including disability equality, and diversity, and it wants to encourage good practice across the public sector. In November 2007, it convened the first meeting of a public sector diversity network, which will bring together a range of public sector employers to enable effective networking and the sharing of equality and diversity best practice, with a focus on human resources and employment issues.

Looking ahead, it is just a year until Scottish ministers are required to publish their reports on the progress that public authorities are making towards achieving equality for disabled people, which is a key aspect of the disability equality duty. The intention is to report on progress across the public sector on disability equality and to set out proposals for co-ordinating activities to bring about further progress. I look forward to continued engagement with disabled people, disability organisations, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the public sector as we progress that work, and to engaging with the committee today and in the years ahead as we work towards the shared goal of true equality for disabled people in Scotland.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for that statement, minister. We now move to questions.

We will cover a variety of the recommendations that fall within your remit.

I want to start by considering the legislative and policy contexts. The second recommendation in the report states:

"The Committee recommends that, as part of the consideration given at the drafting stage of bills, the Scottish Executive should give full consideration to any implications for equalities legislation, in particular the Disability Discrimination Act, and report on this consideration in the equalities statement contained in policy memoranda that accompany all newly introduced bills".

The background to the question is the evidence that devolved legislation sometimes makes it harder or more expensive to comply with requirements, such as those on physical adaptations to premises. How will you ensure that that issue is considered in the various policy initiatives?

**Stewart Maxwell:** We are committed to continuing to ensure that the implications of equality legislation, including the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, are considered during the drafting stage of bills. It is the responsibility of each of the portfolios and the relevant officials to ensure that that is done when bills are drafted. Each of the portfolios and directorates is aware of that, so those matters should be considered. I understand that the recommendation arose not because such consideration was not being given, but because of concern that that consideration has not been as full as it should have been in relation to certain pieces of legislation. We will endeavour to ensure that such consideration is given to all pieces of legislation that the new Government produces.

**The Convener:** I want to press you a little further on how you will endeavour to ensure that that happens. Will you write to committees to underline that the issue has been raised and has caused concern in the past?

**Stewart Maxwell:** All ministers and their officials are well aware of the previous Equal Opportunities Committee's report. As I have said at previous meetings, I am more than happy to engage with my colleagues and with committees of the Parliament on these issues. As I said in my opening statement, I have written to my ministerial colleagues on some of the issues. As I think I said the last time that I was at the committee, I have raised several of the issues with ministerial colleagues, at meetings, and with the relevant officials to ensure that, throughout the Government, equalities work, such as equality impact assessments, is done and that equalities are considered at the drafting stage. I am doing my part to ensure that my colleagues and their officials are well aware of the requirement to undertake that work as they go through the

drafting process, rather than as an afterthought. It is important that that thread runs through all their work. I have made that commitment to the committee and I have written to ministers and raised the matter with individual ministers in meetings.

**The Convener:** That is encouraging.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** The previous Administration accepted the committee's recommendation that we should focus firmly on the social model, rather than a more medical model. I think that all the organisations that made statements in connection with the previous Equal Opportunities Committee's report supported that. What is the new Scottish Government's position on the model that should be used? In what policy context does it envisage the social model being used?

**Stewart Maxwell:** On the general principle, there is no difference between us and the previous Administration. We support the same model and the work on that is carrying on as before. We have not shifted away from that model to another one—that is pretty clear.

Sorry, but did you ask how the model will impact on something?

**Hugh O'Donnell:** Yes—on policy. For example, how will it impact on support for independent living?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The model is a bit like a thread running through everything that we do. Officials are well aware that the model has been adopted and that it should be the underlying principle that they adopt when they work on Government policy.

You mention independent living policy—I am happy to talk about that. We strongly support progressing independent living for disabled people in Scotland, and I plan to make announcements about how we will do so early in the new year. Forgive me if I do not elucidate the exact detail of that announcement today. I think that January is the deadline for that.

**Yvonne Strachan (Scottish Government Public Health and Wellbeing Directorate):** Yes.

11:15

**Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The previous committee recommended that the Scottish Government establish a task force to consider the recommendations of the Prime Minister's strategy unit report in a Scottish context and to develop proposals on how to advance the independent living agenda in Scotland. Given that the committee recommended that the work should be undertaken as a matter of urgency, can the minister tell us what actions—if any—the Scottish Government has taken in that regard?

**Stewart Maxwell:** As I have just indicated in my answer to the previous question, we take the matter seriously. We are moving forward with our proposals and with our position on independent living as quickly as possible. I have spoken to representatives of disability groups about the matter, and I have made clear our commitment to taking the work forward. The announcement will come as quickly as possible. As I have said, it is our intention to announce in January how we are taking that work forward.

I am not trying to avoid the question, but the detail will be announced in January. We are committed to ensuring that independent living for disabled people is progressed over the next few years. It is crucial that all people get the choice to live as independently as possible. That is particularly important for disabled people. In the past, there has been a failure to give them that choice. Those are our intentions over the next few years.

**Marlyn Glen:** The committee looks forward to that announcement. However, I will press you on that—the committee does not want to be disappointed when the announcement comes. As you know, the committee is keen to have a monitoring and reporting structure in place. Part of recommendation 4 was to

“establish a monitoring and reporting structure for the task force”.

I press you to take that on board. If you do not wish to answer that point now, I look forward to your addressing it in your announcement.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I certainly hope that you will not be disappointed. We intend to announce the detail in January, and we will ensure that the committee gets the full detail of the announcement when it is made. It will then be up to the committee to decide how to take the matter forward. I think that I will draw the line there and not say any more.

**Marlyn Glen:** But you will take on board the point about the monitoring and reporting structure.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I will answer that point in January.

**Marlyn Glen:** We will be very disappointed if you do not.

**The Convener:** We move to the mainstreaming of service provision, which the minister covered in his opening statement, to an extent, and there has been confirmation that the equality strategy will be examined. We want to press him a little bit more on the extent of mainstreaming.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** The report recommended that mainstreaming should be

“treated as a matter of priority”.

At this stage, can you say how progress in mainstreaming, and the pace at which it is happening, will be increased across the Government's workload?

**Stewart Maxwell:** We will answer your question in two parts: I will begin with the broad-brush approach; and Yvonne Strachan can give the detail of what is happening at official level.

As I said in my opening remarks and when I was last at the committee, the Government is clearly signed up to mainstreaming. It is extremely important that it occurs. There is no slackening of the commitment, and I pay tribute to the previous Executive. A lot of work was done in previous years, and we are trying to push forward as quickly as possible.

Yvonne Strachan can explain better than I can the detail and how things operate in individual directorates.

**Yvonne Strachan:** As the minister indicated, we have an overall principle of trying to mainstream—I will talk about disability, as I understand that that is the committee's focus. We try to ensure that, in all development of policy and practice in the Government, disabled people's needs and issues of disability equality are taken into account. The impact assessment process is an important feature of that.

The minister has indicated to the committee previously that we have undertaken a range of activities to try to strengthen the equality impact assessment process in the Scottish Government, not least by creating a specific tool, which is available to all staff. A series of briefings on that was rolled out from September 2006 and is still on-going. There is a process of briefing, information and guidance for those who are responsible either for bill activity or for developing policy and strategies in the Scottish Government. We recognised that—again, the minister has mentioned this previously—the process needed to be strengthened and we are looking at the way in which some of our other systems, such as business planning and internal audit processes, will contribute to the monitoring and measuring of effectiveness around our equality impact assessment process.

There are some broader issues, such as the importance of having appropriate data and information. That was always an area on which there was criticism not of the Executive but of institutions in general and their ability to deliver on the equalities agenda. The Scottish Government has provided high-level statistical information to inform policy makers' decisions. The Equal Opportunities Committee's report has been part of the information available to help officials develop policy and understanding. Likewise, materials that are produced by the Equality and Human Rights

Commission—which were previously produced by the former Disability Rights Commission—are fed through to help inform the available data and information.

Where possible, we are also disaggregating, or breaking down, data according to equality groups, so that, over time, the information that is available to policy makers can be developed and strengthened.

We are undertaking a range of activities. I appreciate that the committee's time is tight—I hope that I have given you a flavour of what is being done. There are obviously questions about human resources and what the Scottish Government, as an organisation, might do to strengthen that area. The minister has talked about the diversity forum and its part in shaping policy and ensuring that the Government takes its employment responsibilities seriously and does what it can to improve the diversity of its workforce and the way in which its disabled staff are treated. Our disabled staff network is part of that process.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** Thank you. I take on board what you and the minister have said. I am particularly interested in the increased pace at which those things will be done. Are the mechanisms in place to monitor how quickly the equality impact assessments are being done? Are they are being done not only expeditiously but effectively?

**Stewart Maxwell:** Apart from the principle of disability equality, to which we are all signed up, one of the main drivers of the work is the disability equality duty. There is a target in place as well as a date by which we have to report, and ministers are required by statute to do certain things. Much of the driving force is therefore the principle—we support that and we want the work to happen as quickly as possible—the statutory timetable, the reports we have to make and the duty on ministers and the Government to carry the process through. The drivers are the principle and our support for it, and the legislation that underpins it.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** I take it that we are on track to deliver on the recommendations within the required time frame.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I certainly hope so.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP):** The report recommended that promotion of equalities should be part of the job descriptions and performance competencies of all public sector staff. The previous Administration's formal response gave a fairly detailed description of how that was to be done for Scottish Government staff. Do you have a view on how that process can be extended to cover the wider range of public sector staff?

**Stewart Maxwell:** We are responsible for Scottish Government staff and, as part of the on-

going discussions with local government about the new concordat and the national outcome and single outcome agreements, there is an opportunity to make sure that much, if not all, of the public sector is lined up and facing in the same direction on these issues.

A lot of detailed work is involved, but it is clear that the Government's role is to ensure that local authorities and other public sector bodies proceed at the same pace as us—if not faster. Ensuring that they are doing that would be a useful part of those discussions. I expect nothing less of local government and other parts of the public sector than that they sign up to the agenda and do such work, as we will.

**Bill Kidd:** Delivery of public sector performance on equality has been patchy. I know that you are not responsible for health, but the duties on all parts of the public sector follow much the same lines. Student nurses at Glasgow Caledonian University are trained in dealing with the disabled. That is fantastic as far as it goes, but it does not cover student doctors and other health service staff. Such training creates a future performance expectation. Does a plan exist to give qualified doctors and nurses who are in situ such training in dealing with the disabled?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I should have said in my previous answer that local government is equally subject to the disability equality duty.

The public sector diversity network, which is relatively new, has made a difference. It will assist in spreading the message around the whole public sector. As you are probably aware, the network will bring together several public sector employers to engage on the issues. The network will be important to rolling out many of the measures that we are discussing.

It is clear that the duty applies to local government. The network will involve other public sector employers, to bring them up to speed and ensure that we do not have the patchy arrangement that you described. That will be the main conduit for rolling out much of the work.

**Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** The report highlights a low rate of participation by disabled people in community and public life. What is the new Scottish Government doing to promote disabled people's participation in community groups such as school boards, community councils and tenants associations?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The member may be aware that the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland has issued a consultation document "Diversity Delivers: The proposed strategy for enhancing equal opportunities in appointments process". The proposed strategy for enhancing equal opportunities in Scotland's ministerial public appointments process. That is part of the answer.



An important issue for us is ensuring that the public appointments process is mainstreamed.

As for the wider point about access to leisure facilities and other facilities, it is clear that much that is involved has a statutory underpinning. Local authorities, the rest of the public sector and the private sector have a statutory duty to ensure equality of access and equality of opportunity in the facilities that they own, manage and run. In effect, much of the work that is being done is underpinned by that statutory duty.

Beyond that, we spend much time and effort on ensuring that many organisations and bodies are aware of the necessity to think in the early stages of planning for new facilities and for adapting facilities about how to ensure equality of access for all people and particularly for disabled people. Much of that work continues. Over many years, we have inherited facilities that are not adapted and are difficult to adapt. Work to deal with that continues. We try to ensure that that happens as quickly as possible, but the task is big and will take some time.

**Bill Wilson:** My second question has been answered.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** The report recommends that sportscotland review its target for participation by disabled people in sport and asks whether there might be a mechanism for meeting that target more speedily. Have you discussed the issue with sportscotland? What is your view of the current target?

11:30

**Stewart Maxwell:** I can honestly say that I have not had any personal meetings with sportscotland to discuss this very ambitious target, which, along with a range of other targets for sportscotland, was recommended in the review of sport 21 and set out in the reaching higher strategy. However, it is clear that sportscotland has not yet met all those targets and that, unfortunately, a number of them have been missed.

I am not aware that officials and sportscotland representatives have held more detailed meetings on individual targets, so I cannot answer your question. I will certainly check and try to get back to the committee with a more detailed answer.

As I have made clear, the target is challenging, as are the other targets in the strategy. As the member is aware, we are examining the sports structure in Scotland and will announce in January a structure that we believe will deliver on that issue. In any case, I would not be too hard on the organisation, as its task of shifting perceptions and dealing with the physical difficulties and barriers that lots of people face in participating in sport is

very difficult. It is very well aware of the target and I do not doubt that it is doing its utmost to meet it. As I said, I will speak to officials and try to find out details of any meetings that have taken place on the matter, but I personally have had no such engagement.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** I hope that the restructuring that you refer to does not impact negatively on sportscotland's attempts to meet the target that is highlighted in the disability inquiry report. We will await your response on that matter.

Another issue relating to sportscotland is the active schools programme. Has the Scottish Government any plans to ensure the programme's sustainability and, if so, will you share them with us?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The active schools programme is constantly monitored to find out whether it is meeting its objectives. I am not sure whether you are getting at anything specific beyond that.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** The question is more about your plans to make the programme sustainable. Perhaps it would be helpful to ask that question alongside my other question on this matter, which relates to whether the Government plans to continue to provide sportscotland with funding for active schools. The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport in the previous Administration said that priority would be given to continued funding, and we are trying to establish whether the current Administration shares that view and will continue that funding.

**Stewart Maxwell:** As I said, monitoring of the success or otherwise of the active schools programme is on-going. I have made pretty clear in a number of statements my support for the programme, which is an important tool for getting young people outside, physically active and engaged in sport. That said, I have also expressed concern that the programme should not sit in isolation and that it should be connected with outside bodies, organisations, clubs, governing bodies and any other relevant stakeholders.

As set out in the budget that was announced on 14 November, funding for the active schools programme will continue to 2011, and we hope to ensure that it is rolled out and enhanced. The programme is good, but it needs to be a bit more connected to outside organisations to ensure that young people can be physically active and involved in sport not just in the school environment but outside school hours and with other bodies. I can assure the member that there is no reason to suspect that the funding will not continue to 2011.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** Sportscotland referred to funding for an active schools co-ordinator for inclusion in each local authority. Are you in a position to say whether that funding is included

within the overall budget and has been enhanced in line with inflation? How is the matter being taken forward?

**Stewart Maxwell:** It is for each local authority to identify the requirement for active schools in its area, because the situation varies from area to area and even from school to school. It is up to the local authority to determine, within the overall parameters, the programme that best fits local needs. It is not for me to micromanage the programme. The question should be aimed at local authorities, because they are responsible for delivery.

**The Convener:** I will press you a little further on that. Where good practice is established, is there a mechanism for ensuring that it is spread throughout the country, so that everyone learns from it and benefits from it? One of the strengths of devolution should be that when good practice is established it should be passed on, but often it is not.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Do you mean particularly on the active schools programme?

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I recently had a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, at which the active schools programme was on the agenda. The main point that came out of the discussion between myself, the cabinet secretary and our officials was that one of the things we need to do—it involves our local authority partners, too—is to roll out good practice. It is clear that that does not always happen.

We had that discussion, and we have asked officials to go away and come back with a process whereby we can ensure that good practice—some of us know where there is good practice and perhaps less good practice in our areas—is taken forward. A discussion is taking place about the possibility of bringing together many of the directors in local authorities to talk about the issue, through either a conference or another form of networking, to ensure that best practice in the active schools programme and on physical activity and sport in general is rolled out across the country and that local authorities learn from one another. Some such opportunities have arisen, but it is clear that there has not been even access to best practice across local authorities. Otherwise, we would not have some of the current problems.

We are in discussions on the issue and we hope to bring forward proposals next year that will allow local authorities to access one another in a co-ordinated fashion. That would enable best practice in some parts of the country to be rolled out in other parts.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston)**

**(Lab):** I will stay on the theme of funding, but ask some questions from the perspective of problems that have been identified.

Concerns were expressed during the inquiry about the impact of short-term funding on service provision to disabled people. The committee recommended that the Scottish Government, in conjunction with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other stakeholders, commission research into the different types of funding that are available to sport and cultural organisations to identify how funding can be made sustainable. Has the Government commissioned such research? If not, do you intend to do so?

**Stewart Maxwell:** As far as I am aware, the previous Executive did not take forward that recommendation, and work to complete a mapping exercise on funding sources and sustainable support for the disability sector has not yet happened.

**Yvonne Strachan:** It has not happened.

**Stewart Maxwell:** We will undertake that work, but, given the time of year, that will not happen until the new year. The outcome of the review of sportscotland is one part of the jigsaw. However, as I said today and as I said last week the announcement on the review of sportscotland will be made early in the new year. That will allow us to take forward a number of issues, including the exercise that you mention. That has not yet been done, but the intention is to do it in the new year once the new landscape is clearer.

**Elaine Smith:** I look forward to the result of that.

Let me move on to cross-cutting issues. As might be imagined, the issue of attitudes played a big part in our discussions throughout the inquiry. The committee commissioned research on attitudes and made detailed recommendations on how disability equality training should be provided as part of a package of measures aimed at combating negative attitudes towards disabled people.

In your opening statement, you talked about partnership with disabled people. The previous Administration commented favourably on the committee's findings and agreed to establish an expert group of disabled people to help it to develop its approach. The group was to be asked to consider the issues that were raised by our report and the commissioned research. Has such a group been established? If so, what progress has it made on the committee's recommendations?

**Stewart Maxwell:** Work was on-going throughout 2007, both prior to and post the election. In August, we established a small

consortium of disability-led organisations such as Inclusion Scotland, the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living and the Lothian Centre for Integrated Living. We funded the group to develop thinking on disability equality training. The intention was that the group would develop its thinking in line with the recommendations in the committee's report and that training programmes should be devised, developed and delivered by disabled people. That work is on-going, as the group was established only in August.

In the new year, we intend to establish a wider group of organisations including other training providers. The intention is that the new group will meet to consider the development of standards and accreditation for such training. As you said earlier and as I said in my opening statement, we are committed to ensuring that we deliver on the recommendations for disabled people. The small consortium has already been established and is on-going and the new group will meet in the new year to set the standards that we expect. I know that everyone, including the Government, wants such work to happen as quickly as possible but I expect that much of the work will be completed in the new year at some point.

**Elaine Smith:** I think that we are happy with that commitment, but I just want to be clear. Will the group include disabled people as well as the umbrella organisations?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The answer is yes. The obvious place to start was with some of the organisations that have expertise in the area, so that is why the small consortium was established. Next year, we are looking to widen that out to involve others. The wider group, which has not yet been established, will have a much bigger role to play. Thus far, only a small consortium has been involved in the work.

**Elaine Smith:** Another of the committee's recommendations regarding attitudes was that the Scottish Government should

"fund ... a long-term, strategic campaign aimed at tackling negative attitudes towards disabled people."

The committee made detailed recommendations about the nature of that campaign. In its written submission, Strathclyde partnership for transport noted that it would be happy to participate in a campaign. The previous Administration's working group on disability echoed the need for such a campaign. What plans does the Government have for that? What approach does it intend to take? Is such a campaign being considered? Obviously, tackling negative attitudes is pretty key.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Absolutely. I am sure that committee members are aware of the survey that was published last week on social attitudes, although that was not specifically about attitudes towards disabled people—

**Elaine Smith:** I think that we will discuss that as part of our work programme.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Okay, I will not discuss it now.

Clearly, attitudes are one of the most difficult things to try to change in any society. There is no point in underestimating the size of the challenge that we face on attitudinal change. However, the example that is often used is that of attitudes towards drink-driving. When I was young, people thought it unfortunate to get caught for drink-driving. It was seen as okay and no one really bothered. It took a generation—20 to 30 years—to change attitudes to drink-driving, even though those attitudes were not particularly ingrained. Drink-driving was just one of those things on which people had taken a view. Unfortunately, some of the attitudes about disability have been ingrained in our society for a very long time.

11:45

Let me deal with the specific question about how we will take forward the work. The principle that I want to establish is that it is best for Government to work in partnership with existing organisations, which undertake many campaigns on their own. The committee is aware of campaigns such as are we taking the dis? by the Disability Rights Commission and creature discomforts by Leonard Cheshire Disability. A few weeks ago, I was fortunate enough to host a dinner to mark Leonard Cheshire Disability's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I was impressed by the work that the organisation is doing in this area, especially by the creature discomforts campaign, which uses well-known cartoon figures to make its point. The best way forward is for us to work in partnership with such organisations, many of which are running excellent campaigns. I want to explore how we can best assist and work alongside them in doing that, instead of having a separate Government campaign.

**The Convener:** You made an analogy with the campaign on drink-driving. It could be argued that that campaign was effective because it was on television and raised public awareness of drink-driving and the problems that are associated with it. How will working with organisations have the same impact?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The matter will have to be discussed with the organisations involved, but cinema, billboard and TV advertising will be part of the campaigns. Leonard Cheshire Disability's campaign is running in some cinemas and will run on television in the new year. Many organisations with substantial resources are investing in such work. It is important that we work with them, instead of doing separate things and running

different campaigns at the same time, which may confuse matters. We want to ensure that the campaigns that organisations run are successful and to run joint campaigns with them, because they have a great deal of expertise in the area and their staff have considerable experience of such campaigns. I have seen some of the current Leonard Cheshire Disability campaign and I do not think that we could do better working on our own. I am keen that we should work in partnership with such organisations.

**Marlyn Glen:** My question concerns accessible formats for information. The previous Equal Opportunities Committee recognised the work that the previous Administration was doing in relation to translating, interpreting and communication support services, but noted that that work tended to focus on longer-term developments. The committee recommended that the Government

“identify ways to increase the provision of transcription services and improve turnaround time in the short-term ... until such time as its current work in this area can influence service provision in the long-term.”

Has the Government made any progress in that area?

**Stewart Maxwell:** You are right to say that there have been a number of changes over recent years. The number of interpreters and translators has risen. Not long ago, we had a debate in the Parliament on British Sign Language. The work that has been done until now has generally been welcomed, but I accept that it is progressing more slowly than many people would want. It is a long-term project to ensure that we have everything in place for the future and that there is sustainable provision of translation and sign language services. There is no doubt that we support and will carry on that work. Hilary Third or Yvonne Strachan may be able to provide details of short-term work that is being done.

**Marlyn Glen:** My question was about recommendation 130, on the provision of transcription services, in particular.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I apologise—I was looking at the wrong recommendation. There is an implementation group for recommendation 130. It is finalising a national strategy, which will be consulted on early in the new year. That work is on-going, and we intend to roll it out next year.

**Marlyn Glen:** You have already answered part of the question that I intended to ask about recommendation 131, which relates to British Sign Language.

**Stewart Maxwell:** There are a lot of recommendations in the report.

**Marlyn Glen:** It was a huge piece of work, which is why we are keen to follow up on the details.

Recommendation 131 asked the Scottish Government to identify

“further mechanisms to support and encourage the teaching and learning of British Sign Language in Scotland to accelerate improvements in the short-term in addition to the support it currently provides to increase the training of British Sign Language interpreters and tutors.”

The Executive stated in its response that it would ask the BSL and linguistic access working group to look at the recommendations. Are you saying that that will happen in the new year?

**Stewart Maxwell:** Perhaps Hilary Third can answer that question.

**Hilary Third (Scottish Government Public Health and Wellbeing Directorate):** I will say a couple of things about the group's work. As you have recognised, increasing the number of interpreters is a long-term process. It is estimated to take seven years to train somebody as a fully qualified interpreter. We have focused on putting in place the long-term building blocks to make that long-term change possible. We could not even start with interpreter training; we have had to ensure that BSL is being taught to higher levels to feed into the interpreting courses. Over the past couple of years, we have funded a training for trainers course through Heriot-Watt University, and we are considering whether that needs to continue into the future. There must be deaf tutors available to teach other teachers how to train people to the highest levels of BSL, so that there is an appropriately qualified pool of people who can then go on to interpreter training.

In addition, we recognise that the ways in which interpreters can train in Scotland are limited to a part-time, unfunded weekend route through Heriot-Watt University. We are working with the BSL and linguistic access working group to see whether there are alternative ways in which we should be piloting interpreter training. For example, we might consider a work-based or apprenticeship model. We have asked the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters to look at that in detail on our behalf, working closely with the group.

The group is about to finalise its strategic road-map, which will help the Government and other key organisations to improve performance on linguistic access. That document will be published in February.

**Marlyn Glen:** The committee recommended that the Government review its targets for increased training of interpreters and tutors. Has that happened?

**Hilary Third:** The numbers have increased fairly significantly, and the current target is probably still realistic given the length of time that the training takes. We are keeping a watching brief on that,

and we are working closely with the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters.

We are conscious of the fact that it is difficult to increase the speed and the traffic through the interpreter training route, although we consider that a long-term development. Therefore, we are also funding some work through Deaf Connections, which is piloting interpreting services online. The pilot scheme is about making better use of the existing, albeit limited, pool of interpreters and could have a direct impact on deaf people throughout Scotland—especially those who live in remote or rural areas outside the central belt, where most of the interpreters are located. The service uses internet-based technology to link up a deaf person with a qualified interpreter. We will have the results of that pilot scheme in March, and we look forward to seeing how it has played out. Such services have had a significant impact on the number of interpreting assignments that have been undertaken for deaf people in the community in other countries. We will keep the committee updated on that.

**The Convener:** You say that a lot of interpreters are in central Scotland. Why has Heriot-Watt University been singled out as the only university to deliver the course?

**Hilary Third:** That is right. Heriot-Watt University is the only place in Scotland where interpreters can train, and it is the only route at the moment. However, we have taken information from other countries about how they have developed interpreter training routes. We took a group from the BSL and linguistic access working group down to the Welsh Assembly Government, which has funded a different route to interpreter training that is heavily based on an apprenticeship scheme. The approach that the BSL and linguistic access working group will consider over the next three years will draw on the best of that scheme while retaining the advantages of our established route and building on that rather than replacing it.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** Has Makaton featured in any of the work that has been done? As you are probably aware, Makaton is a limited version of BSL that is designed specifically for people with learning disabilities. There are also training and access issues with Makaton. Have those featured in the access group's work?

**Hilary Third:** The focus of the group that I have described is principally on sign language and linguistic access, although it covers other forms of deafness and deafblind people as well. There are similar issues with training other communication support workers—for example, deafblind communicators—and the group's remit covers other forms of communication support, but not specifically Makaton. We can find out more about that from our colleagues in adult care and support

who have lead responsibility for people with learning disability, and come back to the committee, if you wish.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** That would be helpful. Thank you.

**Bill Wilson:** Perhaps this is not a question that you can answer immediately, but it occurs to me that, given your comment that only Heriot-Watt University has the facility for sign language interpreter training and that it is done only at weekends and is only part time, interpreters might be heavily concentrated around Edinburgh, with progressively fewer as we spread out throughout the country. Do you know whether that is the case?

**Stewart Maxwell:** It could be. We cannot force people to stay in certain parts of the country, so there is no doubt that the spread of interpreters is not even throughout the country. It is not within our remit to direct people to where they should stay and work, nor would I want it to be. However, you are right to point out that the fact that the course is based at Heriot-Watt has an impact on where interpreters are based. I understand that some of the work on distance learning that is being developed will allow people to train in other parts of the country. We are trying to offset the imbalance but, as Hilary Third pointed out, Heriot-Watt is the only institution that is carrying out that work at the moment.

**Marlyn Glen:** What is the position of the BSL and linguistic access project manager? The position was an 11-month fixed-term appointment. Are there plans to extend it?

**Hilary Third:** We are aware that the document that will be produced in February will provide us with the tools that the Government needs to improve linguistic access but that that will not necessarily happen unless we continue to work on implementation. We have earmarked some resources—although it is still early days—for implementation, but we have yet to determine how it will be done and whether it will be done through extending the existing post or through another route. We are aware that we need to put resources into ensuring that the document will have an impact within and beyond Government. Some of our external delivery agents will have an important role to play.

**Marlyn Glen:** You mentioned an impact beyond Government. I have a question on information for businesses. During the disability inquiry, the previous committee recognised the requirement for businesses in Scotland to understand the need to provide alternative formats and to know where to obtain relevant assistance and training. Recommendation 133 was that the Scottish Government and relevant agencies should

"work with organisations such as the Disability Rights Commission, Scottish Accessible Information Forum and Update to disseminate information to businesses".

What is the Scottish Government doing or planning to do to support the dissemination of such information?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The Scottish Government has produced guidance on alternative formats and it is available to Scottish Government staff. On disseminating it more widely, we continue to support the work that the Scottish accessible information forum is undertaking. The forum has submitted a new grant application for funding for the next three years. The decision on that funding has not been taken yet, but we expect to make it in the near future.

12:00

**The Convener:** Are there any other questions on that section?

**Marlyn Glen:** I will leave it there unless the minister can say anything about direct accessibility for businesses.

**Stewart Maxwell:** The purpose of the forum is to assist in that work. We have done good work, and the forum is awaiting the decision on funding, which, as I said, will be taken shortly. It is right that I wait for that decision before discussing what will happen in future.

**Marlyn Glen:** Recommendation 134 was that the Scottish Government should be a best-practice provider of accessible formats. The response from the previous Administration noted that publications were made available in alternative formats

"where the targeted audience was known to include disabled people"

and that requests for alternative formats would otherwise be

"considered on an individual basis".

We found that position problematic at times. How will you ensure that the new Scottish Government improves on it?

**Stewart Maxwell:** In what sense was it problematic? We intend to carry on with that approach.

**Marlyn Glen:** Improving things rather than waiting for people to ask—

**Stewart Maxwell:** We always try to improve things. I hope that the general approach is not in question. Is the issue more about the specifics?

**Marlyn Glen:** The general approach is just to include what we call the usual suspects. Is it possible to widen it out and ensure that everybody has access?

**Stewart Maxwell:** That is the intention. The intention is not to try to cut anybody out. I will go back and consider whether there are particular problems with our way of working.

**Marlyn Glen:** The committee wanted the whole process to be more proactive.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Rather than waiting for people to ask.

**Marlyn Glen:** If you wait to be asked, it means that there is a delay.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I will examine that point and I may come back to the committee on it. The intention is that publications should be available in many formats so that people can access them. However, I may wish to consider further and come back to the committee on the question whether our approach should be proactive or reactive.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** Following up on what Marlyn Glen said, if we recognise the general principle that disabled people are part of all sectors of society, information that is available to all sectors of society should also be available to all disabled people in the same way and on the same terms, so that they do not need to ask for it. Marlyn Glen's point was clear—the mere fact of having to ask for something special in terms of a publication is potentially discriminatory.

**Stewart Maxwell:** There may have been a misunderstanding, but that is certainly not what is happening. The material is being produced. The question is whether it is being disseminated proactively. The material is available in many formats, such as the internet. I am sure that Marlyn Glen will tell me if I am wrong, but the question is whether we are ensuring that that information, in those formats, is known about by the individuals who require it in those formats, or whether it is sitting there, available to be accessed, but the individuals and groups who wish to access it are unaware of it. It is not a matter of groups having to ask for material in formats that we have not produced yet. We are proactive in ensuring that the work is done and is produced in a variety of formats, so that as many people as possible can access the information. However, I accept the previous question—it is worth my considering how the work is disseminated.

**Marlyn Glen:** We say we want to mainstream, yet there are barriers to providing material in alternative formats, which means that we are not mainstreaming.

I return to a previous question about meeting sportscotland to discuss sport. The committee expects every such meeting to have equalities at its heart. If you have a meeting with sportscotland, we expect you to discuss sport for disabled people as a general rule rather than as an add-on or in a special meeting.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I accept that. Perhaps you will forgive me if recent meetings have concentrated on the review of the structures rather than on some of the other issues.

**Marlyn Glen:** If you are reviewing structures, it is even more important that it is based on equalities.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I accept that, but we are talking about administrative structures. I am saying that the delivery of sport, information, advice and all the other things that the current national body does is critical to people in all sectors, including disabled people. All those things are taken into account when we discuss the general issues.

The on-going review is about whether the current structure is fit for purpose in the widest sense. I thought that your question was specifically on a discussion about disability. I was trying to be absolutely clear and honest with you—I have not had a direct conversation or meeting with sportscotland about disability and access to sport.

**Bill Wilson:** To return to the theme of accessibility, as you know, there were concerns that not all websites are equally accessible to all individuals. Recommendation 136 was that the Scottish Government should have a campaign to encourage more organisations to make their websites fully accessible. In February 2007, the previous Executive responded that it had

“plans to work in partnership with the Scottish Digital Alliance and other key stakeholders to tackle the issues around accessibility.”

Has any progress been made in the area since we received that response?

**Stewart Maxwell:** Yes, the work of the previous Executive has been continued by the current Government. In response to recommendation 136 and discussions about a digital inclusion strategy, an accessibility guide was published on the Scottish Government website in September. The guide is intended to provide jargon-free advice to help people to use their computers. That work has been taken on board. I do not think that we have had any feedback since the publication of the guide in September, but perhaps it is early days yet.

**Bill Wilson:** You are seeking feedback on the guide.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Although we are always actively seeking feedback, discussions with several groups take place regularly. I hope that the guide will be helpful, but I suspect that we will hear quickly if there are any problems with it.

**Bill Wilson:** To shift on, the committee recommended

“that public sector organisations ensure that they clearly publicise details of the accessibility of their services to ensure that those service users who may have individual access requirements are fully aware of what is available to them”.

How does the Scottish Government ensure that service users are aware of the accessibility arrangements that are in place for Scottish Government services? That was recommendation 138.

**Stewart Maxwell:** To be honest, I do not have anything specific to say about that recommendation, other than that of course we ensure that such work is done through our current engagement and networks. There is nothing to say about any specific changes since the new Government took office. The work is on-going. As far as I am aware, no additional work has been done in the area that would meet recommendation 138, but perhaps Yvonne Strachan can add to that.

**Yvonne Strachan:** The recommendation was about the public sector as a whole making publications available. As the minister said earlier, given the disability equality duty, one would expect the public sector to view its responsibility to disabled people as an important feature of how it delivers its work, in the same way that the Scottish Government does in the context of its work. I refer you to the earlier answer about the guidance on our internal systems and our responsibility as an employer to ensure that information is relayed clearly to our staff. We will continue to do that as a responsible employer.

**Bill Wilson:** I move on to recommendation 139, surprisingly enough. The committee recommended that the Scottish Government investigate mechanisms to develop a strategic approach to sharing good practice and providing accessible information throughout Scotland. In its response, the Scottish Government's predecessor stated that it would undertake research to examine the information and advice needs of disabled people, the range of existing information that is provided and how access to information and advice might be improved. Is that work being progressed? What is the timescale for a report on the findings and for action to be taken on the report?

**Stewart Maxwell:** It is a bit like an answer to a previous question.

**Bill Wilson:** The question is on timescales.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I did not mean that the question was like a previous question, but that my response will be a bit like a previous response. The response by the previous Executive was given only earlier this year. We have yet to decide on the grant application that we received from the

Scottish accessible information forum. Progress on tackling the recommendation will be clearer in the light of that decision. The answer is that, thus far, no particular progress has been made on the recommendation. However, work will be taken forward in the light of the decision on the grant application.

**Bill Wilson:** Did you say that a decision will be made in January?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I did not put a date on it; I said that the decision will be taken very soon.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** Would January be a good guess?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The decision will be taken as soon as possible. Many organisations across all sectors are awaiting such decisions because of the tight timescale for the budget. We are getting through the applications as quickly as possible. The Scottish accessible information forum application is one of the applications on which we have not decided yet. Many organisations are in the same boat. We will progress the applications as quickly as possible.

**Bill Wilson:** It will happen soon.

**Stewart Maxwell:** In other words, the decision will be taken soon.

**The Convener:** Is it a priority, minister?

**Stewart Maxwell:** All the grant applications are a priority. Many people are awaiting our decisions on them, which impact on people's employment and the services that are provided. We want to ensure that the information gets out there as quickly as possible. The decisions about grant funding applications for many organisations will have to be taken very soon, because many organisations have legal requirements and therefore have to be sure about their funding past the end of the financial year. The decisions will be taken as soon as possible.

**The Convener:** We look forward to seeing how "as soon as possible" translates into practice.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** That is 15 all, I think.

**The Convener:** The last part of the report that we wanted to ask you about is that on physical access. Bill Kidd will cover this section.

**Bill Kidd:** I will ask about progress, so we will see how we do.

The previous committee recognised that access panels can play a crucial role in working with local authorities and the private sector on accessibility issues and the built environment. It recommended that the Scottish Government

"work with Scottish Disability Equality Forum and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to develop an effective, long-term resourcing strategy for access panels."

Your predecessor accepted that that was a desirable recommendation. Will you update the committee on any progress in relation to the recommendation on access panels?

**Stewart Maxwell:** We take the same view on the principle of access panels as the previous Administration. We think that they are important and we see them and their umbrella organisation—the Scottish Disability Equality Forum—making a significant, on-going contribution to the delivery of a more inclusive environment in Scotland. In common with previous answers, this involves being caught up in a grant application system. I am not absolutely sure where we are on this.

**Hilary Third:** Different bits of Government fund access panels for different elements of their work and for the support organisation. Panels have already been awarded funding for the three years from 2007 to 2010; that would have been subject to the spending review, but I understand that the funding will now have been confirmed. In addition, we are discussing with the Scottish Disability Equality Forum what further support we might be able to offer from the equality unit over the period 2008 to 2011 to help the forum to develop its work. We have found some resources in the current year's budget to enable the forum to commission research in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the panels. We hope that that will help to inform its future activities—in particular, how it develops its relationship with local authorities. We have had some early discussions—we met with the forum last week—and those are continuing.

12:15

**Hugh O'Donnell:** If I picked you up correctly there, you said that there are various bits of Government that are responsible for various bits of funding for the access panels. Do you think that it would perhaps be more efficient and effective if funding for the panels was provided from one central source so that they did not have to make a multiplicity of grant applications?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I do not know the detail of exactly how that funding operates, and I do not have it in front of me; I apologise for that. I can go away and look at it. Generally speaking, the Government has made it clear that, in principle, it is trying to minimise the number of funding streams to which organisations have to apply, to ensure that more of their effort is spent at the chalk face than on making funding applications. In principle, I accept what you are saying, but I do not know the detail of that particular process. I will look at it, and maybe I can answer that in some detail subsequently.



**The Convener:** I wonder whether Yvonne Strachan or Hilary Third can provide any detail that might help.

**Hilary Third:** The previous funding picture was quite complicated for a variety of reasons but, as I understand it, support is currently provided through a part of the health directorate that is specifically concerned with the accessibility work. The work that we are seeking to support is more about the development of the role of the panels and the consultation and engagement work that the Scottish Disability Equality Forum carries out. We can provide a more detailed answer afterwards, once we have liaised with our colleagues.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** Thank you. That is really encouraging—I appreciate that.

**Bill Kidd:** My question is linked to that. Voluntary organisations obviously have funding issues, and the previous committee recommended that the Scottish Government

“consider whether the role of the access panels is best delivered by volunteers alone”,

which could prove problematic if funding is difficult to access. The previous Administration agreed to consider that. Can you tell us whether any such consideration of delivery by volunteers alone has taken place and whether any decision has been reached?

**Stewart Maxwell:** Sorry—can I ask which recommendation that is?

**Bill Kidd:** That is recommendation 145.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Yet again, I will say—it is a bit like the previous answer, really—that a three-year grant for 2007 to 2010 is in place, but other parts of the picture have not yet been put in place. We will certainly discuss with the umbrella body for access panels how we take that forward, and how we can best support them. I cannot give you a direct answer until some of that is resolved. It is very important that we consider the role of volunteers within that decision-making process. Again, part of the funding is in place. The decisions on the rest of it still have to be made, and that will impact on how access panels are taken forward.

**Bill Kidd:** Following on from that, the predecessor committee recognised that the access panels are required to have

“a consistent level of knowledge and expertise across the country”

and

“across the whole range of access issues”,

and it is recommended that the Scottish Government

“ensure that sufficient training and guidelines are provided to access panels”

to support the process. That is recommendation 147. What work has been undertaken so far in relation to that recommendation?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The Scottish Disability Equality Forum clearly has a role in that area, in supporting and developing the access panel network. As we have already said, we have provided funding for the period 2007 to 2010, to help to facilitate much of that work. Beyond that—as I said in answer to previous questions—the full picture is not yet in place, and we will get that as soon as possible. I have answered the same question several times. Timing is everything, and we are in the middle of the process. However, as Hilary Third said, funding is in place for 2007 to 2010 for the organisation to take the work forward. The other parts will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

**The Convener:** That concludes our questions, minister. Just before we leave the subject, however, do you think that the recommendations that have not been covered today could be covered by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning?

**Stewart Maxwell:** That is a matter for them. I cannot speak on their behalf. I presume that the committee will decide whether it wishes to write to the cabinet secretaries and invite them to give evidence.

**The Convener:** The matter was mentioned during our away day, and we advised the First Minister that we intended to ask other colleagues to come and speak to the recommendations. It seems to the committee that one way to deal with the matter neatly, given the remits of the two cabinet secretaries, is to invite them along. I will write formally to the First Minister to advise him of that, but it would be helpful to have your view. I am asking not whether they will be available to cover the other recommendations but whether they could cover them. If we limit our invitations to those two cabinet secretaries, do you agree that there will not be any gaps?

**Stewart Maxwell:** As I said, I cannot speak for them. It is up to the committee to decide who to invite to give evidence. However, I appreciate that those two cabinet secretaries would cover, if not all the other recommendations, certainly the vast majority of them. I would have thought so.

**The Convener:** That is helpful. Thank you.

I thank all the witnesses for coming to give evidence on what is an important issue for the committee and the wider disabled community.

## Work Programme

12:21

**The Convener:** We move to item 2. I invite members to consider paper EO.S3.07.09.02, which lists a number of suggestions for work to be added to the committee's work programme.

The first suggestion is that, after we hear from the Minister for Public Health on the Government's ageing strategy, we hold a round-table discussion or a panel discussion on age, to take the issues that arise a little further. Do members agree with that approach?

**Elaine Smith:** Convener, in relation to that suggestion and the next two, will you clarify whether we would hold round-table discussions or panel discussions?

**The Convener:** I might as well mention the other two suggestions. The second one is a round-table discussion or panel on carers, and the third is a round-table discussion or panel on women offenders. If the committee agrees to the suggestions, the clerks will prepare proposals on the discussions. Do members agree that we should consider those proposals in private at a future meeting? That will allow us to decide which witnesses we would like to invite.

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** That is helpful. Thank you.

The next suggestion in the paper is that we ask the Scottish Parliament information centre to prepare a research paper on school and workplace bullying. Is that agreed?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** The next suggestion is that we write to the Educational Institute of Scotland to find out its position on the recent employment discrimination case of Glasgow City Council v McNab. Is that agreed?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** The next suggestion is that we ask the Justice Committee, as part of its inquiry into the effective use of police resources, to include further questions on policing from an equal opportunities perspective. We have those questions listed. Are we agreed on that course of action?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Are members agreed that we ask the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture, Linda Fabiani, whether the Scottish Government has commissioned, or intends to commission, research on whether pupils who use

the Scots language in primary schools face discrimination?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Are we agreed that we will invite representatives from the European Commission and the Scottish Government to discuss the legacy of the 2007 European year of equal opportunities for all?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is well established in its work and has groundbreaking strategies in place. Do members wish to invite the commission to give us a briefing on its work?

**Elaine Smith:** We ought to do that. It would be apposite because a previous Equal Opportunities Committee visited Northern Ireland in the first session of Parliament.

**The Convener:** So we all agree to invite the commission.

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** An outstanding issue in our work programme is to explore the possibility of working with the Equality of Opportunity Committee of the National Assembly for Wales and with the Northern Ireland Assembly on devolved equal opportunities issues of interest. Do members agree to the committee ascertaining how to progress that work?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** That is helpful.

Members will be aware of the recently published Scottish social attitudes survey, "Attitudes to Discrimination in Scotland: 2006". Do members want a briefing on it, given that its findings caused considerable concern?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Finally, we must consider whether to do a taking-stock exercise on religion and belief. Predecessor equal opportunities committees carried out similar exercises for the five other equality strands. Do members agree to carry out a taking-stock exercise on religion and belief, just to complete the picture?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We have agreed our work programme, but I put in the caveat that, if the proposed hate crime bill were to come to this committee, we might have to reconsider the work programme. We have left a little bit of slack in it to take account of any subordinate legislation or petitions that come to the committee. With that caveat, are members happy with the work programme as agreed?

**Bill Kidd:** I am not sure about the process. In what order will we see the people whom we will invite? What issues have priority?

**The Convener:** Instead of undertaking an inquiry this year, we have decided to have round-table or panel discussions to inform a decision on which issue to single out or a decision on a running order for the issues that we want to tackle. However, given that the previous Equal Opportunities Committee spent two and a half years on the issue of disability, the work programme is designed to take a broad-brush approach to encompass as many different aspects of the Equal Opportunities Committee's remit as possible.

We do not necessarily have to deal with the issues in the order in which they appear in the briefing paper. However, the round-table and panel discussions will have a high priority, and we will key in other issues at various times, not least the evidence-taking session for the review of discrimination law, which will be on, I think, 1 February, at which Harriet Harman will speak to the committee in private. Sessions like that will be tabled into the calendar.

**Elaine Smith:** I have a couple of points. First, we should bear it in mind that the briefing on the attitudes survey might throw up further work for the committee. Secondly, our committee reporters may wish to take little bits of evidence on particular issues in the course of the work programme—we have already had a meeting on gender. I want to ensure that there would be time to deal with those issues.

**The Convener:** Yes, absolutely. I have had an indication that reporters will want to submit reports to the committee. Such reports will be included in the work programme.

The clerks will work up a paper on the taking-stock exercise on religion and belief that the committee will consider in private at a future meeting, so that we can decide how to tackle the issue. Does the committee agree to that approach?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** I remind broadcasting staff and members of the public that the committee is moving into private session to discuss item 3. I wish everyone a very merry Christmas.

12:30

*Meeting continued in private until 13:01.*



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:

**Thursday 3 January 2008**

#### 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 RR Donnelley 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**

#### **Scottish Parliament**

**RNID Typetalk calls welcome on**  
**18001 0131 348 5000**  
**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