

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 6 May 2008

Session 3

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

7th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP)

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

*Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

*Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

John Park (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:

Ian Macnicol (Scottish Parliament Directorate of Resources and Governance)

Aneela McKenna (Scottish Parliament Chief Executive's Group)

Mike Pringle MSP (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 6 May 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Interests

The Convener (Margaret Mitchell): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Equal Opportunities Committee's seventh meeting in 2008. I remind all those present, including members, that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be switched off completely, as they interfere with the sound system even when they are switched to silent.

Our first agenda item is a declaration of interests from our new member. I have much pleasure in welcoming Richard Baker to the committee. Do you have any relevant interests to declare, Richard?

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, convener. I am a member of the trade union Unite, but beyond that I have nothing to declare.

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Equalities Report 2007

10:01

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is evidence taking on the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body equalities report 2007. Members also have some questions on the equal opportunities staff audit 2007. I am pleased to welcome from the corporate body Mike Pringle MSP, whose portfolio includes equalities; Ian Macnicol, the head of personnel with the Scottish Parliament; and Aneela McKenna, our equalities manager, who is no stranger to the committee. I invite Mike Pringle to make a brief introductory statement.

Mike Pringle MSP (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): I thank you, convener, and the committee for inviting me to give evidence on behalf of the corporate body. As equality is one of the Parliament's founding principles, it remains a key priority for the SPCB. That principle provides the impetus for driving forward our work on equality. Over the years, we have made strong efforts to promote a culture in which equality is integral to what we do. We have never been complacent about our performance and have always strived towards excellence in delivering the equality framework.

As members may have noticed from the annual equalities report, 2007 was another successful year. I am impressed with how the staff in the organisation have driven forward the agenda with such enthusiasm. Increasingly, they have assessed the impact of their decisions on different equality target groups and ensured that equality is not merely an afterthought. I will describe just a few of the initiatives that we have taken. We launched our gender equality scheme and were awarded the changing places award for Scotland for improving access for people with profound learning and physical disabilities visiting the Parliament. In the staff audit, which was published last week, 96.1 per cent of staff who responded said that they would recommend the SPCB as an employer. Most organisations throughout Scotland would be extremely satisfied with such a response from their staff—I suspect that that does not happen in many organisations. There is a good gender balance in all grades, including senior positions, and we employ a higher number of disabled people than there are in the average Scottish workforce.

An important aspect of equalities work is to monitor everything that we do so that gaps can be identified in our work. If we do not monitor progress, how will we know how successful we are or where further development may be needed? That is why we are working towards improving our

data—that is a key part of the gender, disability and race equality schemes. We know that there is still a lot to be done and our improved monitoring information will show that there is more to do. Working towards equality is about continuous improvement and identifying and removing barriers so that we make a positive difference. It is crucial that we continue with that process if we want to bring about change.

I am happy to take any questions from the committee.

The Convener: I commend the SPCB on the activities that were undertaken last year to promote equalities. That work was impressive.

In your estimation, how close is the Scottish Parliament to becoming an organisation in which equal opportunities and equality issues are observed fully by all staff and members?

Mike Pringle: I, too, pay tribute to the staff in the equalities team. Aneela McKenna and her colleagues have done an excellent job. As we were walking across the garden lobby just this morning, we were complimented by an MSP on the equalities report, which shows that it is being read. That is good.

The SPCB has made significant progress in its equalities work, and we expect all staff and members fully to adhere to the principles of equality, fairness, dignity and respect. The report demonstrates that equality is being built into the work that we do. Equality is not just an afterthought; we are continuously working to ensure that it remains central to the carrying on of business in the Parliament.

More than 76 per cent of our staff say that we are making significant progress. I suggest, therefore, that staff have a positive perception about equalities being an important aspect of the organisation. We have had no formal complaints of discrimination.

The Convener: Are you confident that the building and its processes are fully accessible to all groups in society?

Mike Pringle: We are quite confident about that. A lot has been done to ensure that the Parliament is accessible to all groups in society. We have enhanced a number of our services through engagement with equality target groups, particularly through the work of the three equality schemes on gender, race and disability. That has led to improvements to lighting and signage in the building; to the enhanced accessibility of the new main hall exhibition; to improved facilities for parents and expectant mothers; and to the new changing places facility, which will improve access for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. There is training for tour guides, and

publications are designed to be easily read. Portable seating is available for tours.

Aneela McKenna (Scottish Parliament Chief Executive's Group): We have made significant progress on disability and access in the Parliament. In particular, work has been undertaken in the main hall, where there have been great accessibility improvements. Accessibility was prominent in what we wanted to deliver. For example, there are angled displays, which can be used by people with wheelchairs, and audiovisual equipment. The exhibition is making greater use of symbols and pictures, too. We are pleased with that.

The most important thing is our work with disabled people, which we have done a lot more of over the past few years. We have worked with the Profound and Multiple Impairment Service, RNIB Scotland, Capability Scotland and the Audio Description Association Scotland. It is from those organisations that we learn about what we have to do. Working with disabled people helps us to continue to improve.

Ian Macnicol (Scottish Parliament Directorate of Resources and Governance): There was a sense that we were not capturing all the disabled people who work for the SPCB in our engagement, given that the number of staff members who declared themselves disabled in the information that we hold in the personnel office appears to be lower than the number who declared themselves as disabled in the staff audit. We have taken steps to rectify that. We have written to all staff—and we sent out a reminder just last week—to encourage folk to come forward. Staff may have issues that we can help with, but we are unlikely to be able to do so unless they come forward. We hope that we have created an environment in which people can share their difficulties with us, and we stand ready to help.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I congratulate you on the excellent report and on the obvious hard work that is continuing. Following all the work that has been done on access, have any problems been identified that you have still to resolve? One example that springs to mind is the small booths adjacent to the chamber, where the official report staff and others have to work. Those booths seem to be tight work areas, and I wonder whether some resolution is required.

Mike Pringle: The building itself is a restriction in that respect. I agree that access to some areas is quite restricted, but I am not sure how that could be changed without incurring substantial costs.

Aneela McKenna: The official report has been carrying out work on accessibility issues to find out whether the role of official reporters with, for

example, mobility disabilities could be changed to suit. Mike Pringle is right to say that we are restricted in what we can do with the building. However, if we can make adjustments to ensure that people are not disadvantaged in their jobs, we will work towards doing so.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I congratulate you on producing such a positive report. However, I have a couple of questions about wheelchair users and people with visual impairments. First, I know that this is a difficult issue, but have you considered installing stairlifts, for example? If the lift is not vacant, members of the public and, indeed, staff on the ground floor can find it very difficult to get to the main chamber. Secondly, I know that you have improved the lighting in the visitor centre but those with visual impairments still find it difficult to move around. Obviously, making such improvements for the staff will improve the situation for other users of the building.

Mike Pringle: I agree with your comments about the ground floor. I do not think that enough thought was given to how disabled people might get from the ground floor to the chamber and/or the visitors gallery. The only way to improve the situation would be to install a stairlift. The parliamentary authorities can certainly look at the proposal, but it will be pricey. Like all MSPs, I have conducted tours with people in wheelchairs and, as we all know, getting three or four wheelchair users into the gallery can create what might be described as a bottleneck and can take quite a bit of time. However, I do not think that it will be easy to solve the problem.

Aneela McKenna: Again, we are restricted in what we can do with the building. We have not examined such proposals in detail, but we can certainly pick up on the issue this year.

The Convener: That would be very much appreciated.

There have been problems with the Parliament's loop system. Indeed, I remember one occasion when it totally failed for a group of deafblind visitors. Therefore, I am very pleased to note that work has been done on the system. Are you happy that it is now fit for purpose?

Mike Pringle: As happy as we ever are. For example, despite the fact that the Parliament has an information technology department to filter out spam, this morning I—like everyone else, I am sure—came in to find my inbox full of it. We can never be 100 per cent confident about anything, but the loop system seems to have improved and—as Aneela McKenna will be able to confirm—I do not think that we have had any complaints about the telebraille recently. Let us keep our fingers crossed.

Aneela McKenna: One thing we must do is ensure that the loop system is constantly checked and maintained. We will need to work with facilities management on that matter.

The Convener: Who is responsible for that?

Aneela McKenna: The facilities management office.

The Convener: Who is in charge of giving people a prompt in that respect?

Aneela McKenna: Stewart Gilfillan.

The Convener: It is a good idea to keep checking the system. After all, it is very important for those with hearing difficulties.

Mike Pringle: I will certainly speak to Stewart Gilfillan about it.

The Convener: Thank you.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): As you are aware, the committee's remit covers the prevention, elimination and regulation of discrimination between persons on a variety of grounds, some of which—for example, social origin, personal attributes and beliefs or opinions—are fairly broad. Are the SPCB's equal opportunities policies focused solely on those groups for which anti-discrimination legislation exists? Are you considering examining the wider remit in order to develop policies to tackle some of the broad-sweep issues?

10:15

Mike Pringle: The SPCB wants to ensure that everyone is treated equally and fairly when accessing or participating in the activities of the Parliament. We recognise that particular groups in society face greater disadvantage in the labour market and in wider society, and our goal is to work towards policies and services that are inclusive and accessible so that no one is excluded.

We also have a legal responsibility to promote equality and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of race, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief. We must meet certain statutory requirements that promote fairness in the development of our policies and procedures in the areas of grievance and discipline, for example. Our role is also to engage with those who are less engaged with the Parliament. We actively target those groups that cut across areas of equality and are identified through social class and social origin.

Hugh O'Donnell: You seem to suggest that you view your work as being in the broad area of equalities—that is, broader than the equal opportunities portfolio. If that is the approach, are

you working within any particular legislative framework, and are there any principles underlying it?

Aneela McKenna: We work from the position that everybody has to be equal, so we must be inclusive in everything that we do. We must think about the areas in which we need to be proactive. For example, we know that the groups that are covered by the legislative framework face greater disadvantage, so we have been proactive in that respect. We have always been a proactive organisation, and our work goes beyond equal opportunities.

The definition of equal opportunities has in the past focused on employment and policy work, and it has involved a reactive approach. Equalities, and the way in which the legislation has developed, encourage organisations to be much more proactive. As an organisation, we have always been very progressive—even before the disability equality duty, the race equality duty and the gender equality duty came in, we set up the framework to be proactive. It is not just about having a policy or a statement in place that says that we will be equal to all—we actually do more than that. We try to take positive action measures when necessary.

Hugh O'Donnell: That is very encouraging—thank you.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): Moving on to specifics, the report mentions that SPCB staff undertake equalities and diversity training courses, and that an equalities and diversity week was held in the Parliament last November—the report is nicely illustrated with the photographs of that. Can you be more precise and give a bit more detail about what the Scottish Parliament's diversity policy is and how it differs from equal opportunities or equalities policies? Can you also explain what benefits diversity has brought about over and above the benefits brought about by equal opportunities policies?

Mike Pringle: The SPCB's main priority is to achieve equality and eliminate discrimination. Many different approaches have been developed over the years to achieve that, and one of the more recent developments in organisational policy approaches is the recognition of diversity. We have therefore used that approach at times to help strengthen the messages that we want to convey about equality. However, at the same time we do not forget the social justice principle of equality, which involves implementing measures to eliminate social group-based discrimination and disadvantages.

Aneela McKenna: We do not have a diversity policy as such. As Mike Pringle says, we are very much focused on equality and eliminating social

group-based discrimination and disadvantage. We use an organisational policy approach to enhance our approach to equalities. We will never use it in isolation; we will always use it along with equality.

Diversity is about recognising individual difference rather than being about social group-based disadvantage. We have used the concept to help bring a new dimension to equality and to help people engage in the subject in a different way. That is why the training and awareness week looked at both equality and diversity, even though the overarching framework is to do with equality—we do not bring diversity into that. When you are trying to raise awareness among a whole organisation, you want the staff to know that it is about everybody and to recognise the importance of the diversity of everybody in the organisation. That is why we have used the term “diversity” on occasion.

Marlyn Glen: The Parliament has been developing a positive action programme for black and minority ethnic people to encourage applications from BME communities and to raise awareness of the Parliament as a potential employer. Do you see BME people as a homogeneous group or are you seeking to encourage applications from specific types of BME people, such as black people, Polish people, Jewish people or people of Pakistani origin?

Mike Pringle: The SPCB is committed to undertaking positive action where we feel that it is necessary. We have identified a downward trend in the number of black and minority ethnic people applying for posts in the Scottish Parliament. Our aim is therefore to target all black and minority ethnic groups who could work for the Parliament. We want to work with careers offices in the further and higher education sectors and with BME organisations, which can identify individuals who have the right skills to bring to working in the Parliament. That is the way forward.

Marlyn Glen: Would you consider such programmes for other groups of people who might be underrepresented in the Scottish Parliament's workforce on the grounds of their age, religion or social origin?

Mike Pringle: Yes. We should consider any group that we feel is underrepresented in the Parliament. Being old myself, I suspect that age is one factor. A number of organisations now say that they employ older people because they are more reliable. Perhaps we should consider that in the Parliament.

Through our disability equality scheme, we have already identified the underrepresentation of disabled people in our workforce, although we have a slightly higher rate of disabled people among our staff than many organisations have.

The staff audit that we carried out showed an increase in the number of staff who identify themselves as disabled. That is an interesting point. Previously, a lot of people did not regard themselves as disabled. What is the exact definition of disability? More people are now willing to say on a piece of paper that they think that they are disabled, which is encouraging from the point of view of our staff. Although we have a higher than average proportion of disabled people in our workforce, we have made a commitment to target disabled people to encourage them to take part in the programme that we run in the Parliament.

Marlyn Glen: I want to turn the issue around a bit. According to the report, 70 per cent of the Parliament's workforce are Scottish. Is that a smaller percentage than you would expect? If so, is it a shortfall that the SPCB is concerned about?

Mike Pringle: We have a slightly smaller percentage of Scots than many organisations; we have a higher percentage of people other than Scots. To me, we have the people who want to work here. If they want to work here, they apply for the jobs and they get them. If we ended up with Scottish people accounting for 50 per cent of the workforce, would that be a bad thing? I am not sure that it would. It would just show that lots of people want to come and work here.

Ian Macnicol: All we are interested in is that people have the right skills for the job.

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): That is slightly contradictory. First, you said that we try to ensure that no one is discriminated against, but then you said that we take the people who want to work here if they have the right skills for the job. Let us say that people from a group of the BME population are not applying for other reasons. The answer that you just gave might imply that they do not have the right skills for the job, which might not be the case. Your answer seems to contradict what was said before.

Aneela McKenna: We have to monitor that information. We have to look at the application success rate. Ian Macnicol is absolutely right that people have to have the right skills for the job. After that, however, we have to consider whether disadvantaged groups in society are coming into the organisation. If they are not, we have to be proactive and ensure that we encourage more people from those groups to work for us or to see us as an employer of choice.

Bill Wilson: With respect, it is not just about the right skills for the job. People might have the right skills but there might be reasons why they are not applying. Logically, if a section of the population is underrepresented, should you not be considering whether there is a reason for its underrepresentation? I do not mean to be

offensive, but Ian Macnicol's answer about people having the right skills for the job seems rather complacent.

Ian Macnicol: It is a difficult balancing act. Essentially, we want people with the right skills for the job but, as Aneela McKenna has explained, we also have to consider the breakdown of the staff population. Is any sector overrepresented or underrepresented in the organisation? If a sector is underrepresented, we have to ask ourselves whether we are doing all we can to encourage that sector to apply. We will not take people in if they do not have the skills for the job, but we are considering whether we are offering the whole population opportunities in the right way to encourage applications. That is what we are doing with the BME population. We are going out and promoting ourselves because we see that that group is slightly underrepresented.

Bill Wilson: That is what I would expect you to do. However, that is not quite the same as the answer you gave to Marlyn Glen when she asked about 70 per cent of the workforce being Scottish. If there is underrepresentation, you did not say whether you were examining why it exists. What the heck—perhaps people just do not want to apply.

The Convener: The explanation we have been given makes it clear that the skills must be considered first. However, if there is a gap, consideration must be given to where that gap can be filled.

Aneela McKenna: It may be that black and ethnic minority people do not have the right skill sets, so we are working towards bringing them up to the same level as everybody else. As an organisation, we can consider helping them to develop their skills, such as interview skills and the skills set that they may require for work in the Parliament. That is part of the work that we will be taking forward later this year.

Sandra White: Continuing on the theme of discrimination, page 41 of your report mentions the equalities impact assessment process, which has been delayed until December 2008. The process will be targeted at groups that have traditionally experienced discrimination. Will it consider the type of issues that Bill Wilson and others raised? Aneela McKenna said that the Parliament is very proactive in relation to legislation. How have you identified the

"groups which have been traditionally discriminated against"?

My final question is about an issue that is not just an equality issue; it runs throughout society. Are people being specifically discriminated against by the Scottish Parliament, for example as a result

of social origin or age, or are they being discriminated against in some other way?

Mike Pringle: We are guided by the national body—the Equality and Human Rights Commission—as to which groups face discrimination in wider society. To ensure that those groups are not discriminated against in the Parliament, it is in our interests to develop a strong framework for equality. That is what we have done and will continue to do. It is important to monitor our work to ensure that there is no discrimination against equality target groups.

Aneela McKenna: We cannot deny that there is discrimination in society, which is why organisations have to be particularly careful to ensure that their policies and procedures and the services that they provide are not exclusive or discriminatory in any way. Our job is to ensure that we do not discriminate against groups.

In answer to Sandra White, if we feel that there is discrimination, we monitor carefully our staffing and our services to establish whether there are barriers for people and, if there are, whether we can do something about them. For example, the work on the disability equality scheme highlighted issues to do with the Parliament building, such as with the signage, the lighting and the lack of tactile resources for tours. We know that information only as a result of our monitoring work, which is what will drive forward the development of our equality framework.

10:30

Sandra White: You seem to be targeting the areas in relation to which there is legislation. Are you also identifying people who have been discriminated against because of their age, religion or social origin, for example?

Aneela McKenna: In the engagement strategy, for example, there are three target groups: black and ethnic minority people, disabled people, and young people who are not in employment. Those groups have been identified as the ones that we need to ensure participate more with the Parliament, which demonstrates that the work involves not only equalities issues but social origin issues. That is an example of where our work goes further than is required by legislation.

Sandra White: Will the report that is due in December 2008 identify some such areas?

Aneela McKenna: The equalities impact assessment process will consider only the six strands. By law, we are only required to do impact assessments on race, disability and gender. However, we felt that we wanted to go further than that and do assessments on religion and belief, sexual orientation and age.

Sandra White: As part of the personnel office's realignment project, new guidance was devised that explicitly addresses equalities issues and the avoidance of discrimination. That guidance and the issues that it addresses have been incorporated into the revised recruitment and selection training. Can you update us on the success of that new guidance?

Mike Pringle: The aim of realignment was to transfer to the appropriate line manager or business area some of the decisions that are currently taken by the personnel office. The main change to the recruitment process is that line managers now shortlist without a member of the personnel office taking part. We have greatly enhanced the guidance that is provided to selection panel members. We have also updated and expanded the training that is available. The new process is covered in detail during the main two-day recruitment and selection training. We have also developed half-day refresher courses that focus mainly on changes due to realignment. The personnel office is also happy to provide one-to-one coaching for those who take part in selection interviewing. The guidance and training deal explicitly with equalities and anti-discrimination issues.

Ian Macnicol: I think that it has been a success. We put in place all the training and guidance, but my office still has an audit function, so we spot check to see whether sifts are being done correctly, and we track every application from disabled people through the system to ensure that everything goes okay. We also have a role in dealing with complaints or appeals, which gives us an insight into how the process has gone.

We have run the training and refresher courses, and the people who have been party to the new arrangements have given us nothing but positive feedback. The line managers who are conducting selection appear to be competent in what they are doing, and they are ably supported by the guidance and the new training.

Sandra White: You mentioned that you do the training yourself. The report mentions agencies, with some people saying that they cannot get time off for training and other people talking about the financial aspects. Are there checks and balances in that regard?

Ian Macnicol: Yes, because we have an active role in the delivery of the recruitment training. We use a training provider—Stevenson College—to run the course, but we have input into the course and, of course, we designed the course with the college.

Sandra White: In the recruitment literature for internal and external appointments, disabled potential applicants are encouraged to contact the

Parliament if they have questions about a vacancy. How successful has that new approach been?

Mike Pringle: The new wording was introduced in January 2007. Since then, the personnel office has received only one specific inquiry from a potential applicant, which suggests that the approach has made little difference. However, an early analysis of recruitment monitoring figures shows an increase in the proportion of applicants who indicate that they have a disability from 2.8 per cent in 2006 to 3.4 per cent in 2007. Of course, it is difficult to establish the extent to which the new approach contributed to the rise in applications from disabled people, because a number of other changes were introduced at the same time. For example, we improved and simplified the wording of recruitment material and broadened advertising to include a number of disability-related publications. Ian Macnicol might want to add something.

Ian Macnicol: I do not think that it matters whether we have had one or half a dozen inquiries; what matters is that we make the offer. The aim is to remove barriers wherever possible, and one way of doing that is by offering support and guidance to disabled candidates.

Aneela McKenna: That is right. We try our best to work towards a social model of disability, in which we try to remove barriers for disabled people instead of regarding impairments as the barrier. The offer of support and guidance at least represents a step in the right direction, even though not many people have taken up the offer.

The Convener: The increase in disabled applicants is encouraging.

Sandra White: It certainly is encouraging.

Mike Pringle mentioned that in the staff audit some staff said that they were disabled but had not mentioned their disability when they were interviewed. I hope that the more open approach means that people can be more confident about mentioning a disability at interview, instead of waiting until they are offered the job and then mentioning it in confidence. The new approach represents a step in the right direction.

How do you ensure that the fairness and best practice that are applied to externally advertised opportunities are equally applied to all internal job opportunities?

Mike Pringle: For permanent posts, the recruitment process for internally advertised appointments is exactly the same as the process for externally advertised appointments—that is, all opportunities are advertised. The trade unions have the right to comment on the content of

internal adverts, to ensure fairness for their members.

There is a separate policy for temporary internal vacancies. All such vacancies are filled with reference to that policy and most are advertised throughout the organisation. The personnel office does not take part in shortlisting and interviews, but it provides guidance and documentation to managers, to ensure that the methodology that we have described is used and decisions are transparent and justifiable.

Sandra White: You said that the same approach is taken to internal and external vacancies, but who is responsible for ensuring that it is followed? Is the process monitored?

Ian Macnicol: The personnel office is responsible for overall policy and procedures. The trade unions can examine any proposed advertisement and will pick up on anything that they are not happy with, which should give a bit of confidence, because it means that a third party considers the process.

Sandra White: I want to be clear about the process. Although the personnel office is not involved in interviewing all candidates, as Mike Pringle said, it produces the papers for jobs that are advertised internally and externally, and the trade unions monitor the process, to an extent. Is that correct? Is there a monitoring system?

Ian Macnicol: Monitoring really happens by exception, because management and the trade unions have agreed the procedure. Just last week, I think, we updated the policy on filling temporary vacancies, as a result of representations that we received. We live and learn.

The process for filling temporary vacancies is slightly different from the process for filling permanent vacancies, because when there is an immediate need it is not always possible to go through the full rigmarole that would be gone through to fill a permanent vacancy. As far as we can, we ensure that the process is fair and transparent, and if any representations are made my office investigates and responds.

Sandra White: I take the point that permanent and temporary vacancies might be treated slightly differently, but would you consider taking a monitoring role as a check and balance, as you mentioned earlier?

Ian Macnicol: We certainly produce figures at the end of the year that show how many people were temporarily promoted, where, their gender and so on. Is that the kind of thing you are after?

Sandra White: Yes. I just want to see whether there is a difference between internal and external vacancies, and whether there is a monitoring system to ensure that all are treated equally and fairly.

Ian Macnicol: The intention is to give a statistical report in next year's report, and we could include that.

Sandra White: That would be excellent.

SPCB staff at all levels are required to show competence in equal opportunity issues. How is the level of competence that staff should have decided? How are the competence levels differentiated? I have an example. Are senior team members expected to achieve different levels of competence? Is that achievement measured in any way?

Ian Macnicol: A number of competences are required for each job, one of which is equalities. Each competence has four levels, and each level reflects the various skills that are required for specific jobs and posts within given grades.

The competence profile is drawn up by the line manager and the level of competence is arrived at with reference to the specific tasks of the individual job. For example, someone who issues tickets in visitor services would require only level 1 competence, which is basically that they understand the Parliament's commitment to equal opportunities and comply with the relevant legislation and policies. It is about knowledge and understanding of the policies, and engaging effectively.

A post that requires someone with management responsibility to develop policies, perhaps within human resources, would be assessed against level 3, which is about building access and equalities opportunities issues into the policy-making process and making recommendations for doing so wherever possible. That individual might therefore be involved in monitoring or developing policies. That is how the differentiation is made.

It is not really about how senior an individual is; it is about what their job is. So, for example, my recruitment manager is assessed against level 3, whereas our colleagues in the official report might be assessed against only level 1, even though they are at a higher grade than the recruitment manager. The requirements are quite specific to the job.

Sandra White: So there are different levels of requirement. Does that apply to Executive staff? If my memory serves me right, when staff from Pacific Quay came to the committee and we asked them about equalities issues, they said that they were not trained in equalities.

Ian Macnicol: To be honest, I cannot answer that. The Executive changes its appraisal system fairly regularly. I would be surprised if equalities does not feature in it, but I do not have an answer for you.

Sandra White: I am sure we can check it out, but if memory serves, I am sure that they said that they were not trained and it was not part of their job to consider equalities.

You are saying that people are at different competence levels and on different pay scales, and when someone applies for a job they are made aware of the level of competence required.

Ian Macnicol: Part of the induction process is to go through the competence profile for all the different areas and show people what is expected of them, including in equalities. Of course, that is followed up with the mandatory equalities training during induction.

Sandra White: I have a further question on promotion rather than recruitment. If someone working in visitor services requires level 1 competence and others working in recruitment or a managerial post require level 3, is there scope for those on level 1 to train up if they want to apply for promotion? I know that there are issues other than equalities. Is it difficult? I am not saying that you are being discriminatory, but if people cannot be promoted to that level, they might say that they are being discriminated against.

10:45

Ian Macnicol: I know where you are coming from, and I can reassure you on that. Many of our staff are more capable than their jobs require. The levels are simply what they will be judged against, so someone whose job has a level 1 requirement but who operates at a higher level could be judged as being exceptional in relation to that requirement for their job. In fact, many staff bring their skills base up to a higher level than that required for the job and, generally speaking, if they deliver a higher-quality service, it will be reflected in their appraisals.

Sandra White: I am sorry to labour the point, but are you saying that being given the opportunity to work to higher levels of competence means that they are able to go for promotion if they show an interest?

Ian Macnicol: That would be a matter for the individual and his or her line manager in setting their development plan for the year ahead. I am not aware of many people having a development opportunity knocked back if it is agreed that it is relevant to their role, and we encourage staff to take training to better themselves. For example, staff who are not yet in management can do an introduction to management course. We are up for that.

Sandra White: My main point is that the Equal Opportunities Committee's job is to mainstream equalities throughout the Parliament, including its

staff. If staff want promotion, are they made aware that it is built into the job description that they will have to have a certain level of awareness of equalities, so that it will eventually be possible to mainstream equalities throughout departments?

Ian Macnicol: Everyone gets a basic level of training. Then, if a staff member has a greater need in their job, they can ask for more specific training. There is a massive number of learning resources.

Sandra White: So if somebody goes for a certain job, it is not in the job description that they have to have a certain level of knowledge of equalities.

Ian Macnicol: They can get the training after they get the job. Nobody ever comes to any job with the full skills set, so if someone does not come to a job with full knowledge, gaining it will be part of their first development programme.

Sandra White: I am sorry, convener.

The Convener: Do not be. That was an interesting line of questioning.

On recruitment and retention, do you ensure that there is a career path for staff? Do you factor that into the job evaluation?

Ian Macnicol: Not really. We do not guarantee careers in the Scottish Parliament, as we have a relatively flat structure. There are many career opportunities, but we do not strive to engineer career paths and it would be wrong to promise one if it did not exist. For example, there is a clear career pattern for assistant clerks—there are lots of senior assistant clerks and quite a lot of clerk team leaders, so it is possible to see a career path—but, in some jobs, there simply is not a career. In the HR function, for example, my job will not come up until I retire—unless somebody is plotting or knows something that I do not know—so the opportunities are strictly limited for an HR career professional.

However, we try to ensure that the tenure of Parliament staff in their jobs—whether one job or a succession of them—is interesting and stimulating, that they are developed, that they work in a pleasant environment, that they feel secure and that they have a good work-life balance so that, if their next career opportunity happens to be outwith the Parliament, they leave not only with skills that we have given them, but feeling good about having worked here. Before I came to the meeting, I had a look at the exit interviews that we have held over the past 12 months: 100 per cent of those who left said that they would recommend the Parliament as an employer and that they would work for the SPCB again. That is a pretty good track record.

The Convener: It is a fairly enviable track record.

Mike Pringle: It is.

Elaine Smith: In a previous report, the Equal Opportunities Committee recommended that staff and members be given training on mainstreaming. Does the corporate body intend to provide such training for members?

Mike Pringle: The SPCB does not specifically provide training for members. However, we have developed a course for SPCB staff that focuses on equalities in practice and how that can benefit staff through the performance management system. That also ties in well with the impact assessment project that is due to start.

We do our best to invite members and their staff to all the events in the Parliament. I am not sure that attendance is great, but there you go. For example, the equality and diversity week that we held last year was open to all staff and members. Our recently established maternity mentoring network is also open to members' staff. However, the SPCB does not currently spend money on such training for members.

Elaine Smith: If the SPCB does not spend money on such training for members, who will think about training them? Members may not have received such training. They come from different walks of life and have different experiences. Given that the application of equal opportunities is one of the Parliament's founding principles, who will provide such training for members? Obviously, time factors make it difficult to get members together. They have busy lives, they are members of committees that meet at different times and they have constituency days, which means that it is hard to get them into the Parliament. Would it be worth considering doing something when members are in the Parliament? For example, the Government can change the business programme if it wants to make an announcement or a statement. Perhaps something that could capture all members while they are in the Parliament could be considered. We must take the issue seriously. I am at a loss to think who will, if the corporate body will not.

Mike Pringle: I suspect that the corporate body has not taken the matter seriously enough in the past. Elaine Smith says that MSPs have busy lives. Everybody does. Our time in our jobs is filled up.

I would welcome the committee writing to the corporate body on the matter, because members should be trained on mainstreaming, although the corporate body may not thank me for saying that. I am not sure why members have not been trained in the past. Members can rest assured that if the committee wrote to the corporate body to ask that

the issue be raised at a meeting, I would suggest that members be trained. Perhaps the committee and the SPCB should be proactive in promoting training on mainstreaming. I do not know why the SPCB has not historically spent money on training members. Perhaps the SPCB would say that members should pay for training out of their allowances. I am not sure that that would be right, but perhaps the committee should write to the corporate body. Unfortunately, I do not know the answer to Elaine Smith's question.

The Convener: I think that the committee would welcome the question being posed to the corporate body.

Bill Wilson: I have a question on a related matter. I could not find any data on grades in the equalities report. It seems strange that such a report does not give information on grades—on how BME groups are represented at different grades in the Parliament, for example. It is clearly possible to ensure that people are recruited in appropriate numbers, but if an imbalance exists and all the people in the senior grades belong to one group and other groups are not represented—

Mike Pringle: That is a slight change of tack.

Bill Wilson: It is.

Mike Pringle: Can we return to that question in a minute?

Bill Wilson: Yes, I am happy to do that.

Mike Pringle: Let us finish dealing with the other question first. Is it agreed that the committee should write to the corporate body to ask for an explanation as to why members are not being trained?

The Convener: Yes. You can have the assurance that the committee will write to the corporate body and pose the question that has just been posed to you. I hope that we will receive a response.

Mike Pringle: Perhaps we can now answer Bill Wilson's question.

Ian Macnicol: As I mentioned, we plan to include a statistical section in next year's report that will cover the matter. However, if the committee would like statistics in the meantime, we can certainly produce them.

Bill Wilson: That would be interesting. Sandra White has just pointed out to me that paragraph 21 of the SPCB's response to the findings of the staff equality audit 2007 states:

"There were more women than men who applied for promotion posts but they were less successful in being appointed."

Similar remarks may apply to other groups, or other groups may not be applying for promotion. It is important to know such things.

Aneela McKenna: The example of black and minority ethnic people has been given. A very small number of black and minority ethnic people work in the organisation, so it would not be right to break down such numbers by grade. We could not put such information in an audit, because doing so would mean that individuals could be identified. However, we asked the person who analysed the information to consider grades and break down the information according to the six strands. The information on gender showed that the representation of men and women across all the grades was very good. Bill Wilson is right about the importance of such information. We did not dismiss information; we analysed it, but we put only the key points into the report.

The Convener: The provision of such information would be welcome. We look forward to receiving it.

Before we move on to the subject of monitoring, I welcome the President of the Legislative Council of Tasmania, the Hon Don Wing, and the clerk of the Council, Mr David Pearce, who are visiting the Parliament and are sitting in the public gallery. You are very welcome.

Elaine Smith: The Parliament is quite a popular attraction for visitors. Your annual report notes that more than 350,000 people visited the Parliament in 2007 and states that the visitor services survey collected information about age, sexual orientation and race. However, that information was not systematically analysed because suitable software was not available. I have two questions on that. First, what was the purpose of collecting those data if the appropriate analytical tools were not in place? Secondly, why are you interested in collecting data about visitors' age, sexual orientation and race? What can you do if some groups appear to be underrepresented in terms of visitor numbers?

Mike Pringle: We have taken a positive step towards developing our equality monitoring processes, which will, overall, help us to deliver more effective services. I appreciate the fact that the systems are not yet fully effective; however, it is important that we continue to collect the data, as they will, in future, inform us about who is accessing our services and allow us to measure how successful we are in engaging with different equality target groups. Visitor services has recently undergone a major review and will revisit the visitor survey form in the autumn to consider staffing needs for the processing of the data as well as improvements to the existing survey. Less than 1 per cent of visitors respond to the survey—very few people fill in the form—but staffing

resources will be needed to undertake the processing of those data.

Elaine Smith: So, you can go back and analyse the data that you have already collected once the system is in place. Is that what you are saying?

Mike Pringle: Yes.

Elaine Smith: It is worth having the information from that point of view.

Mike Pringle: It is worth keeping it; however, at the moment, there is no computer programme to analyse it.

Elaine Smith: Okay. What about my second question? What would you do if you found out that a certain group was underrepresented in terms of visitor numbers? For example, if nobody over the age of 60 was visiting the Parliament, what would you do about that?

Mike Pringle: It is more likely to be people under the age of 25 who are not visiting the Parliament. I think that we get an awful lot of visitors over the age of 60.

If there is underrepresentation, visitor services, along with the corporate body, could take steps to alleviate that and we could try to engage with those groups. The SPCB's engagement strategy, which was launched earlier this year, highlights specific groups that we are targeting, including disabled groups and black and minority ethnic groups. I think that we need especially to target young people more heavily. I suspect that the only young people who visit the Parliament at the moment come on official visits from schools. Very few young people come to the Parliament at the weekends. We need to encourage more young people to engage with the Parliament. I am very keen on doing that.

Elaine Smith: What changes in practice have resulted from the equalities-related monitoring that you have carried out? One theoretical example quickly springs to mind. We are all very pleased that the Parliament has a crèche. However, if you had found that young mums were not coming to the Parliament because there was no crèche, you could have opened a crèche. Has anything that you have found led to changes in practice that have allowed people better access to the Parliament?

Aneela McKenna: The breastfeeding room is a good example. We monitored the gender of the people who were using the crèche and found that a greater number of women were using it. For that reason, and to have good facilities for those of our staff who have just had children and who come in to visit the Parliament while on maternity leave, we created the breastfeeding room—we call it the parenting and expectant mothers' rest room. That is a good example of the changes that we have

made. We are delighted that the breastfeeding room is up and running.

11:00

Elaine Smith: It is important to make it clear that that excellent facility is on offer and also to make it clear that breastfeeding mothers are free—by law—to feed their babies wherever they wish, provided that they are otherwise allowed to be there. I want to put that on the record.

The crèche is an excellent facility. One of my recent visitors was a man with a young girl. The wee girl went into the crèche and would not come out. That indicates that it is an excellent facility, but how are the efforts to get more people to use it coming along?

Mike Pringle: I agree that we need to make more effort to tell people that there is a crèche at the Parliament and to encourage them to come in with their young children. I have had a similar experience—people who have come in and used the crèche have said that it is excellent. It is important to tell people that the facility is here and that they can use it.

Aneela McKenna: We try our best to highlight the crèche in all our public information literature. Visitor services has also produced a lot of marketing material to highlight that there is a crèche in the Parliament. We try our best to advertise it as widely as possible.

Hugh O'Donnell: On page 34 of the report, in the section on monitoring, a panel indicates average male and female salaries. I notice that there are some differences, although the subsequent paragraph indicates that the SPCB is content with the data. Can we clarify why there may be differences within grades between male and female salaries?

Ian Macnicol: It is to do with progression. If someone is new to the Parliament, they start at the beginning of the salary scale. If they have been here for four or five years, they are likely to be at the top. If a grade has very few people in it, the difference can look extreme. In the most extreme case, the folk who are on the highest wage happen to be women who have been at the Parliament for quite a long time and some of the newer bods are guys.

Hugh O'Donnell: It is encouraging, given the scale of the issue of equal pay in the wider world, that the Parliament has no issues.

Ian Macnicol: There is no problem with equal pay.

Richard Baker: The staff equality audit shows that more than 12 per cent of staff considered that they had experienced bullying, harassment or both

during the past 12 months, compared with 10.6 per cent of staff in 2005. What are the main factors behind that rise?

Mike Pringle: That finding is a concern for the SPCB and for the staff. The fact that 96.1 per cent of staff who responded said that they would recommend the SPCB as an employer shows that people are very satisfied with working here, but at the same time some of our staff feel that they have been harassed or bullied. That is concerning and, obviously, such issues are taken seriously. Although the figure has gone up slightly, we have a zero-tolerance approach to harassment and bullying and we have a culture in which dignity and respect are valued and promoted. We have put in place a number of measures to ensure that harassment and bullying are prevented in the organisation. If inappropriate behaviour is displayed, it will not be tolerated at any level. We encourage our staff to tell us about it, so that we can take steps to address it.

You must bear it in mind that bullying and harassment do not take place only internally—they also take place externally. There has been a little bit of an increase in the number of complaints from staff who have experienced what can be defined as bullying or harassment from people outside the Parliament who are contacting it. There is evidence that the general public are perhaps not as respectful as they might have been in the past. You must take that into account when you consider the figures.

Richard Baker: I picked up on that point in the audit. Nevertheless, almost a third of those who complained about bullying or harassment did so in relation to somebody who had management authority over them or who was at a higher grade. Does that show that staff are becoming more confident in challenging inappropriate behaviour by more senior colleagues, or are you concerned that there could be a rise in spurious complaints by staff who have grievances against their line managers?

Mike Pringle: It is encouraging that people feel confident enough to say that they have been bullied or harassed in some way. Perhaps Aneela McKenna wants to add something.

Aneela McKenna: It is a good thing that staff feel confident enough to tell us about such experiences. We do a staff audit—many organisations do not—and are confident enough to ask, “Have you experienced harassment and bullying?” We take a zero-tolerance approach to harassment and bullying. It might be that the increase in reports is because more staff feel confident enough to tell us because they know that we have good procedures in place to address the problem.

It might be that there are spurious complaints, or it might be that the increased number reflects an increase in confidence. There could be situations in which behaviour is misinterpreted as bullying. One of the things that we need to do in our policy work, which we are strengthening this year, is to introduce a matrix to help staff to identify what bullying behaviour is. They might not know whether the treatment that they are experiencing is an inappropriate behaviour. Bullying behaviour can sometimes be confused with management that is firm but fair.

As Mike Pringle says, we take a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment. We are confident that we have good procedures in place to address problems that arise.

The Convener: Does Ian Macnicol want to add anything?

Ian Macnicol: The statistic is terribly worrying. There are probably a number of reasons for it, but I am sure that there is some genuine stuff in there. We are dealing with human beings and none of us is perfect; there will always be people who will not quite step up to the mark. In my role, I see quite a lot of the problem areas in the staff resource. We know that people do not perform, attend or behave themselves up to the mark. We have to deal with that and it requires firm management. Not everybody likes being told that they are not up to the mark. The statistics reflect such situations to an extent, but that is not to say that there is not genuine stuff for us to be concerned about. We will take the situation seriously.

The Convener: It is a question of putting it into perspective.

Richard Baker: You mentioned your zero-tolerance approach, but the majority of those who experienced bullying or harassment said that their complaint had not been resolved. Almost half said that they had not made an informal complaint. What are the reasons for that? Are you concerned that it shows a lack of confidence among staff about the likelihood of complaints of bullying or harassment being resolved?

Mike Pringle: It is an interesting question, to which it is difficult to give an immediate easy answer. When a complaint is raised, there are good procedures to enable managers and staff to address issues of harassment or bullying. We have a detailed complaints procedure that guides us through making informal and formal complaints, so it is unsettling to hear that some of the cases are not being resolved.

We have looked at the figures that show that 13 out of 22 staff said that their complaints at an informal level had not been resolved; and that two members of staff who took complaints to the formal stage said that they were unresolved. It

might be that, for those staff, there was no case to answer after investigation of the complaint—there was no evidence of harassment and bullying. It might be that the individual was not willing to accept the outcome of the investigation.

The other issue concerns the 13 people who made informal complaints but did not make their complaints formal. We have good formal procedures in place, but those people decided for whatever reason not to take their complaints further. There might be many reasons for that, which could relate to fear about making a formal complaint because they might think it would affect their future career prospects, or they might be perceived as a troublemaker. I think that that was alluded to earlier.

Richard Baker: On that basis, we will be interested to see the effects of the review of the procedures once they have bedded in.

More widely, you mentioned an increase in the incidence of cases of bullying and harassment involving members of the public and people who were not parliamentary staff. Do you have any plans to ensure that members of the public are aware of their responsibilities when they deal with parliamentary staff?

Mike Pringle: To be honest, I think that that would be extremely difficult. All MSPs are aware that we have difficult constituents to deal with. I am sure that there have been cases of inappropriate behaviour, perhaps on a persistent basis, by a member of the public; Ian Macnicol or Aneela McKenna might be able to comment on that. We have all encountered people who have got a bee in their bonnet about something. Once they have got their claws in, they cannot let go, do not take no for an answer and sometimes go over the top. It is a difficult issue.

Aneela McKenna: Dignity at work training is mandatory for all staff. It examines how to challenge inappropriate behaviour and gives people the skills to deal with such situations. Through it, we ensure that staff know that if they feel that they are being bullied, they can raise the matter with their line manager or with one of the dignity at work contacts, who are advisers who provide a confidential listening service to members of staff. That is an additional support mechanism. We are confident that the dignity at work training helps staff to address difficult situations involving members of the public.

The Convener: It probably also reminds members of the public that there is a way to register a complaint.

Hugh O'Donnell: You have dealt fairly comprehensively with the dignity at work issues that I wanted to raise, so I will move on to a potentially controversial area.

Is there monitoring of and a process for dealing with instances of harassment or unacceptable behaviour by members—leaving aside member-to-member behaviour, which is dealt with by the code of conduct and the whips—in their interaction with corporate body staff? How do you keep track of inappropriate behaviour in such circumstances?

Mike Pringle: I am not sure that we do, but Aneela McKenna might be able to enlighten us. I am certainly not aware of any work that we do in that regard.

Aneela McKenna: We have never received a formal complaint from a member of staff about bullying or harassment by a member.

Ian Macnicol: There is often a lot of stushie—although not in this session—but such matters are always resolved informally. In my experience, any member who has upset a member of staff has readily apologised. It is usually a case of the member needing something in a hurry and forgetting the niceties. Issues between members and staff have always been resolved amicably. I have mediated in such cases. It is not an issue.

The Convener: That sounds like good news.

Mike Pringle: I am aware of only one occasion on which an MSP behaved inappropriately towards staff, and I think that it was dealt with appropriately by the people concerned. Aneela McKenna might want to add to that.

Aneela McKenna: We monitor dignity at work cases, not just through the staff audit. We ask our dignity at work contacts to give us anonymous information about cases that they have dealt with, and no such cases have involved members.

Hugh O'Donnell: I have two quick questions. How are the dignity at work contacts trained and what expertise do they have? Secondly, is there a role that the corporate body could play in the event that MSP staff feel that they have been subjected to harassment?

Mike Pringle: I am not sure how the dignity at work contacts are trained; that is a question for Aneela McKenna.

Aneela McKenna: The staff audit highlighted the fact that the dignity at work contacts are not being accessed as much as we would like them to be, so they will be rerecruited later this year and their role will change slightly. At present, the dignity at work contacts provide a service to members of staff who feel that they have been harassed and bullied. They can also meet the alleged perpetrator in support of the member of staff in question. We have decided that, in addition, they should provide a service to managers. If managers feel that they have to address issues of harassment or bullying within their local offices, they can seek advice from the

dignity at work contacts. The contacts go through an intensive three-day course that is run by an equality and anti-discrimination consultancy, and they are trained every year after that. The training includes mediation skills and consideration of what behaviour constitutes harassment or bullying.

The Convener: Our final question comes from Bill Wilson.

11:15

Bill Wilson: Having analysed such data in the past, I know that 85 per cent is a good response rate. I congratulate you on achieving that. Nonetheless, on the ground that one can always do better, do you have any plans or ideas in mind to try to improve the response rate?

Mike Pringle: We always want to improve, but you are right about the response rate. If any of us got an 85 per cent response to anything that we did, we would be whooping it up.

Bill Wilson: We would let everybody know about it.

Mike Pringle: Yes. Aneela McKenna and Ian Macnicol might want to comment, but improving the response rate is just a matter of trying to encourage the staff to respond. All staff are meant to respond but, because the survey is pretty much anonymous, we do not know which members of staff do not respond. All that we can do is to get line managers to say, "Remember that you've got the questionnaire to fill in. Have you done it yet?" Somebody said earlier that MSPs are busy people, but the staff are busy people as well. People say, "It's at the bottom of the pile, but I will get round to it," then the date arrives by which it should have been in, and they say, "I forgot to do it."

It is a question of managers encouraging people to fill in the questionnaire. It would be an achievement to get a higher response rate than 85 per cent next year.

Aneela McKenna: We were delighted with the 85 per cent response rate because it means that we have an accurate picture of what is happening in the organisation. We work hard to ensure that staff complete their questionnaires. We have made the audit anonymous. The data are collected by an external organisation so that people feel confident about giving personal information. If people do not respond, we give reminders—there are three stages to that—but we try to do that as sensitively as possible so that staff feel confident.

The survey is in its third year and we have always had a good response rate. Staff are pretty confident about giving us information through the process.

The Convener: Hugh O'Donnell has a final supplementary question.

Hugh O'Donnell: I go back to my question about the corporate body's role, if it has one, in relation to the harassment or bullying in respect of members' staff. Are protocols in place whereby the personnel department becomes involved or are those staff, in effect, on their own?

Ian Macnicol: It is all done under the members' code. Members are responsible for the behaviour of their staff. I cannot quote the members' code at you, but it includes information on how we would deal with a situation that could not be resolved amicably. Ultimately, it would be escalated to the corporate body, which would take action against the member. There would be a sanction. However, we have never been anywhere near that situation.

Bill Wilson: Perhaps Hugh O'Donnell's idea is that, if a form of mediation was on offer, that might help to avoid the situation being escalated to the corporate body. It would be useful for staff if mediation was available.

Ian Macnicol: There is no formal mediation available, but my people would certainly act in that capacity. Also, the employee assistance programme is available to members' staff—and members—to help them to resolve difficult issues.

Mike Pringle: I have been on the corporate body for only a year, but in that time no such issue has even come close to us. We have not had a report from Ian Macnicol that he is dealing with an issue, and he said that such issues have not come to the corporate body previously. It could happen, of course, and we cannot be complacent, but it has never been a big issue.

The Convener: On that happy note, I thank Bill Wilson for his final, final supplementary, but I remind him that it would be as well to ask questions through the chair.

Bill Wilson: I am sorry.

The Convener: I thank our panel members for what has been a thorough evidence-taking session and one that the committee very much welcomes. Thank you for attending our meeting today.

Mike Pringle: I look forward to seeing your letter to the corporate body.

11:20

Meeting continued in private until 12:46.

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