



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 26 January 2022

Session 6



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EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
3rd Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

*Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Paul Beaton (Scottish Government)

Andrew Green (Scottish Beer & Pub Association)

Mike Grieve (Night Time Industries Association)

Ellen MacRae (Edinburgh University Students Association)

Professor Sally Mapstone (Universities Scotland)

Claire Montgomery (Scottish Government)

Superintendent Hilary Sloan (Police Scotland)

Jill Stevenson (Association of Managers of Student Services In Higher Education)

John Swinney (Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery)

Kate Wallace (Victim Support Scotland)

Martha Williams (Girls Night In)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Herbert

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 26 January 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Subordinate Legislation

Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Reconsideration and Review of Determinations) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [Draft]

The Convener (Stephen Kerr): Good morning, and welcome to the third meeting in 2022 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

The first item on our agenda is evidence from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery, John Swinney MSP, and his Scottish Government officials, on the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Reconsideration and Review of Determinations) (Scotland) Regulations 2022.

I welcome the Deputy First Minister and his accompanying officials Paul Beaton, the head of the legislation and contributions unit, and Claire Montgomery, a solicitor in the legal directorate.

I invite Mr Swinney to speak to the draft instrument.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the issue and explain the detail of the affirmative instrument that is before the committee.

As the committee will be aware, at the end of last year, we passed a significant milestone with the launch of Scotland's redress scheme, which opened for applications on 8 December. I am pleased to inform the committee that we have received more than 2,000 calls to the scheme since its launch and that more than 250 application forms have been received. That represents a significant step towards facing up to the wrongs of the past and the harm caused to society's most vulnerable children.

As we move to deliver redress to survivors, we must ensure that the scheme operates fairly for all. Part of that is providing mechanisms to be able to reconsider, and deal with, any determinations under the scheme that are made in error, including those relating to the outcome of a redress

application. The draft regulations before the committee seek to achieve that clear goal.

Section 75 of the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act 2021 creates a reconsideration process, whereby a Redress Scotland panel can revisit a determination already made under part 4 of the act, should a concern arise that the determination was materially affected by error. That includes where a mistake might have been made in making the determination, or where it is thought that a determination was made on the basis of incorrect or misleading information.

Where the panel determines that an error has occurred, it must put that right. Importantly, where an applicant is not satisfied when they are told of the outcome of a determination, they can request a review. Safeguards are included in the act so that an applicant cannot be prejudiced by exercising their review right when the review is linked to the determination of a redress application.

In practice, we hope and anticipate that we will very rarely require to use the reconsideration and review processes, because robust measures have been embedded throughout the application process and wider scheme to reduce the opportunity for error and potential fraud. However, the draft regulations aim to ensure that we have suitable mechanisms in place to support people through the reconsideration and review processes if required. They also allow us to respond in a fair and effective manner to all possible outcomes of the processes that are linked to the determination of a redress application.

Although the range of possible outcomes is complex, the principle underpinning the proposed amendments to the act is simple: as far as possible, we wish to put an applicant back in the position that they would have been in, had no error occurred.

That may mean that an applicant is offered a different redress payment than the sum that they have been offered or have accepted previously, or that they may benefit from a fresh offer where an error has led to them not being given one before. In those scenarios, we intend that applicants will be given the option to do what is right for them, with the benefit of legal advice, by either accepting or rejecting the new offer.

The waiver is a key, and much debated, aspect of the act. It is essential that the way in which the waiver operates is fair. The draft regulations therefore seek to amend section 46 of the act on waiver. The effect of the proposed amendments is that, where an applicant is issued with an updated or fresh offer of a redress payment following a reconsideration or review, the waiver linked to that

offer will reflect the contributor list at the time when the offer should have been made, rather than at the date of the offer itself. That will ensure that, where the offer is accepted, survivors do not miss out on any opportunity that they would otherwise have had to raise civil proceedings.

When a person has already signed a waiver to accept a redress payment offer that has changed following the reconsideration or review process, we consider that it is only fair that they have the opportunity to reconsider their choice and receive legal advice at that critical stage in the process.

We have therefore made provision for that and have ensured that, if a person is content to accept a new offer, the waiver that was signed to accept their original offer will remain in place. If they decide that accepting the new offer is not the right option for them, they will be able to reject it, and any waiver that was signed to accept the original offer will be rendered of no effect.

In the interests of fairness, we have also made provision for a waiver to be rendered of no effect where it is determined that a person ought not to have been offered an award under the scheme.

As I have stressed, the draft regulations ensure that people have access to support and advice, along with the provision for the payment of legal fees and the reimbursement of costs and expenses. That will allow them to fully understand and engage with the reconsideration and review processes and to make the choices that are right for them.

The draft instrument is the final one in a package for the implementation of the redress scheme, and I welcome and appreciate the cross-party support that has ensured that we have delivered the scheme that survivors deserve. I hope that I have provided members with a sufficient overview of the instrument, and my officials and I welcome any questions that the committee may have.

The Convener: Thank you, Deputy First Minister. If any member has any questions or comments, I ask them to indicate that in the chat box.

Deputy First Minister, you rightly put great emphasis on fairness in your statement. Given those principles of fairness, will the person at the centre of the process—the claimant—have guidance and legal advice at each point of the process, and will that be funded?

John Swinney: Guidance will go with the instrument that I have set out today and that we have worked through. At the outset, I should acknowledge that the instrument is complex. The reason for its complexity is that multiple permutations have to be provided for, to establish

legal clarity. I have looked very carefully at the issue with my officials, and there is no easy way around that. Guidance therefore has to accompany the instrument.

In any judgments that a survivor makes, they will be supported by having access to legal advice at any point. A crucial element of the redress scheme in its entire design has been that all applicants must be able to make informed judgments about the right course of action to take. That must be funded. A schedule to the instrument sets out the arrangements for meeting the costs of legal advice, should that be required by applicants.

The Convener: In a case in which there is any suggestion of fraud—albeit that we hope that, as you said, there will be very few examples of that—would legal advice for the individual concerned still be part of the funded package of support that they would get during the process?

John Swinney: Yes. In the process of consideration of what has led to the circumstances that have given rise to a reconsideration, it must be ensured that individuals are supported without prejudice. That fraud has occurred is perhaps a conclusion; it is not a starting point. Individuals therefore have to have access to the necessary advice, so that they are supported in that process.

The Convener: As you have said, it is a complex situation with many permutations. However, in your answers, you have been very clear about the upholding of the principles of fairness at all points in the process, as far as the individuals at the centre of that process are concerned.

As no other colleague has questions for the Deputy First Minister, I thank him for his comments.

Under item 2, I invite the Deputy First Minister to speak to and move motion S6M-02797.

John Swinney: The comments that I have placed on the record are an adequate contribution to the explanation of the instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Education, Children and Young People Committee recommends that the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Reconsideration and Review of Determinations) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 be approved.—[*John Swinney*]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: The committee must now produce its report on the draft instrument. Is the committee content to delegate responsibility to the deputy convener and me to agree the report on its behalf?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I thank the Deputy First Minister and his officials for their attendance.

Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/481)

09:11

The Convener: Our third item of business is also consideration of subordinate legislation. Before asking members whether they have any comments on the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021, I will start with my questions about it.

I have specific concerns about any legislation that involves reducing the requirement to maintain nutritional standards in the food that we serve to children in school. The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020 are designed to keep salt, sugar, fat and saturated fats in food and drink that is provided in schools to an appropriate level. The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021 are in effect—it is a negative instrument, which means that ministers have already enacted it.

I have several questions. Why, at this stage in the pandemic, have the regulations been brought forward? Are there any examples of the regulations being applied in schools since it was enacted last December? What is the reporting method for them? How long will the regulations be in place? On what basis, and at what point—the regulations have no expiry date—will they be removed? I do not think that anyone would want to see this amendment to the regulations on the nutritional value of food that we are serving in schools perpetuated any longer than necessary—if it is necessary at all. It is not entirely clear to me why it is felt to be necessary at this time.

Those are my questions, but there is nobody here to answer them. Willie Rennie wants to add something.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I agree with all your questions. In the papers that we have received, there is no explanation of why the instrument is required. We have seen media reports about how some councils have found it difficult to get supplies of the right quality, but we do not know how widespread an issue that is, whether it is on-going or why that is the case.

The original set of regulations was introduced in April 2021—a significant length of time after we left the European Union and well into the pandemic. I am puzzled, therefore, as to why an amendment is required now, so soon after the

regulations were first brought in. Why was an escape chute—if I can put it in that way—from meeting the standard not considered as part of the original regulations? Why is that being brought in now? There are issues with timing and so on, and I would like an explanation of why the amendment is necessary. We should try to get those explanations from the minister before we proceed.

09:15

The Convener: Quite a lot of questions arise in relation to the instrument. Given the comments that Willie Rennie and I have made, I will, with the committee's agreement, have the clerks draft a letter to the relevant minister seeking an understanding, and answers to our questions, so that we can bring the matter back for further consideration. I hope that colleagues agree to that approach.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I think that it is perfectly reasonable for us to ask for more information, so I have no objection to that. When we ask for that information, perhaps we could also request an update on the progress that is being made with, and the current status and take-up of, the Food for Life programme, through which councils receive assistance to support local purchasing of food from local supply chains. The Soil Association runs that programme, with which I have been involved from time to time. For example, I visited East Ayrshire Council, which is seen as a leader in that regard, and Highland Council, which purchases food from a local butcher to serve hundreds of schools. Such things are not easy, but we all support them—namely, buying local food rather than chickens from Thailand or whatever.

If we are going to ask for information, we could ask for information on that. As I understand it, most of our 32 local authorities—certainly more than half of them—subscribe to the programme, but some do not. It would be useful for us to get an update on what has been—I know that this will be close to your heart, convener—a Scottish Government good-news story.

The Convener: Thank you—I am all for good news, as you know. As the son of a butcher and the grandson of a small farmer, I am all for the idea of sourcing food locally. In the past, we have discussed informally the nature and quality of the food that is served in Scotland's school dinners, so I welcome your comments.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Convener, I think that the line of questioning from you and Willie Rennie is absolutely justified. I draw members' attention to one line in our papers for today's meeting. The Government's policy note says:

"This amendment is intended to be a temporary response to specific circumstances and Ministers intend to revoke it as soon as circumstances allow."

That is precisely what we need more information and clarity on. If the matter could be dealt with in correspondence, that would be ideal.

The Convener: Thank you. That crystallises the concerns that we have expressed.

With the committee's agreement, I will have that letter sent to ministers, and I will share the contents of the reply that we get. Do members agree to that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Drink and Needle Spiking

09:19

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is an evidence session on drink and needle spiking. Joining us today for a round-table discussion are Jill Stevenson, dean of diversity and inclusion and director of student services at the University of Stirling and director of AMOSSHE, the Student Services Organisation; Ellen MacRae, president of Edinburgh University Students Association; Martha Williams of the girls night in campaign; and Mike Grieve, chair of the Night Time Industries Association—I am looking for Mike on my screen; I am sure that he is there somewhere. Ah—there he is. We also have Superintendent Hilary Sloan of the partnerships, prevention and community wellbeing division, and of harm prevention, at Police Scotland; Andrew Green, policy manager—pub operations at the Scottish Beer & Pub Association; Professor Sally Mapstone, the principal and vice chancellor of the University of St Andrews and the vice convener of Universities Scotland; and Kate Wallace, the chief executive officer of Victim Support Scotland. I thank the witnesses for their time.

I will do a bit of housekeeping to begin with. This is intended to be a virtual round-table session. We have all been working on screens long enough to know some of the challenges that that might present for us to have the dynamic of conversation that we would normally have in a conventional round-table session. It is intended that this will be a conversational session rather than a question-and-answer one.

As I cannot see everybody on the screen at any one time, witnesses should put an R in the chat box if they wish to speak. I will come straight to them. They should not wait to be asked to say something if they want to say anything. We want to hear from them and we want to hear them talk to each other. I will monitor the chat box and ensure that everyone who wants to speak is brought in.

I will start our discussion. The number of reported crimes under the two offences that we are discussing has increased significantly, particularly in quarter 4 last year. What do the witnesses think about those offences? Did they rise significantly in 2021? Why has there been a spike—no pun intended—in the reported incidence of those crimes?

I invite Superintendent Hilary Sloan to start us off on that.

Superintendent Hilary Sloan (Police Scotland): As you said, convener, there was a significant increase in the reporting of spiking

incidents in mid-October, which coincided with public concern in relation to wider violence against women and girls. That is where we have seen the increase. The reporting spiked around the Halloween weekend. However, I am really pleased to say that, since then, it has been on a downward trajectory. That is really good news from the Police Scotland perspective. Key to that has, I hope, been the work that we have done in partnership with various organisations, some of which are represented at the meeting, to share communications messages, provide a consistent message to all, and provide reassurance to the public that they should have the confidence to report incidents to Police Scotland.

The Convener: What is your assessment of what caused the uptick over the Halloween period? Was that in a specific geographical area or was it at a set of events?

Superintendent Sloan: The three primary areas where the incidents have been most prevalent are the student cities—Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh—and they usually coincide with the start of freshers week. We usually see an increase around that time but, as you highlighted, there was a significant increase around Halloween, which was due to other issues that were prevalent on social media. We linked with the universities and the organisations that are represented at the meeting to understand the issues, get a clear picture of what was happening, and share a consistent message to ensure that we provided the support that was required for that student population in particular.

Professor Sally Mapstone (Universities Scotland): I agree with Hilary Sloan. There is still a lot of work to do to gauge the extent and prevalence of spiking in Scotland. We might discuss that today and look at how we can best work with young people to ensure that we get that information and use it properly.

The matter particularly affects young people, including students, but we should not think that it is exclusively confined to the student community. It is important to note that spiking is a widespread problem that goes beyond our universities and colleges and the towns associated with them. There is no doubt that it can be associated with the start of term and young people getting together. However, Hilary Sloan has made an important point in stressing the progress that we have made in getting evidence and working with our students and young people to get out information about how to deal with a situation in which they might think that they have been spiked and how to prevent that happening, and to generate a culture of support.

Prevention should be about the perpetrators. It is important that we listen to students and that we

do not get into a culture of victim blaming. That is not appropriate and does not help young people.

The Convener: We can hear the voice of students from Ellen MacRae.

Ellen MacRae (Edinburgh University Students Association): I agree with Sally Mapstone's point that it is not only students who are impacted. I think that every student knows at least one person who has been spiked during a night out. That is not an uncommon occurrence in the student community, but that does not make it any less frightening.

There are issues with reporting. It is hard to know whether there has been an increase in spiking incidents or more people are coming forward. It is challenging for young people to know how to report things. Women and other young people want to come forward, but they do not know whether they will be believed or taken seriously. There is also a variety of different reporting systems, which can feel unclear. A lot of young people do not know whether they should go to the police, their university or their students association. That can be an emotionally burdensome process, so our goal is to minimise the number of times that a young person would have to talk about the matter.

Since September 2021, our students association advice place has had five inquiries about drink spiking and two about suspected injection spiking. However, we know that far more incidents have been reported within the city of Edinburgh. It is difficult to understand the scale of the picture from the level of reporting.

There is also a capacity issue within universities. They are struggling to handle the number of reports of gender-based violence happening on campus and in the city. Some of those cases are linked to spiking incidents.

Martha Williams (Girls Night In): I can give another student perspective on the question of why spiking has escalated. One explanation that I have come to is that we have all been kept indoors for two years. The beginning of term was the first time that people had been able to come out again and experience nightclub culture. Because claims of spiking were suddenly there, they were taken more seriously by the authorities, and other victims of spiking felt encouraged to come forward after they saw that that was being given attention.

09:30

Spiking has always been a prevalent issue. The pandemic has prevented it from happening for a few years, because the kinds of environments in which it happens have not been facilitated, but my analysis suggests that, once the authorities

showed an interest in spiking and became curious about incidents of injection spiking, other victims felt that their stories mattered and that they could come forward.

According to statistics that were recently gathered in a social media spike report in the past month, only 36 per cent of people who believed that they had been spiked reported that to the police and only 62 per cent reported their spiking incident to the venue. The issue is still being massively underreported, and the police and local authorities can do only so much if those reports are not being gathered.

The Convener: What is the reason for that?

Martha Williams: As Ellen MacRae has said, there is a culture of victim blaming. People are afraid that, if they come forward, their stories will not be taken seriously. Unfortunately, there is a lot of shame associated with sexual assault and things of that nature. That comes from a place of fear and years of women being oppressed and sexual assault not being taken seriously. We need to change that focus and do something about stigma to encourage people to come forward. We have to show that, if they do so, they will be supported instead of being shamed.

The Convener: I see that Stephanie Callaghan has put a comment in the chat function, asking for more information about the survey that you mentioned. Can you run through some of the data for us? For example, how did the 36 per cent who reported an incident go about doing so?

Martha Williams: The data were gathered from a social media account that has turned itself into an outlet for people to come forward and report incidents of spiking that they think that they have experienced. As a result, the survey covers not all the spiking incidents that have taken place but only those that the social media account has gathered.

I am not exactly sure what processes were used by the 36 per cent of those who reported an incident to the police over the past month—I think that they were just self-reports—and I guess that the 62 per cent who reported the incident to the venue reached out to staff either through social media or by calling them. I am not sure of the specifics of how people have gone about reporting the incidents, but that is what I think has happened.

The Convener: I wonder whether Kate Wallace can shed further light on that.

Kate Wallace (Victim Support Scotland): Thank you for bringing me in, convener. The underreporting of crime is generally an issue, with fewer than half of those who say that they have been a victim of crime actually reporting the crime

to the police. Martha Williams's figures are therefore not too far away from that.

We know that underreporting of spiking incidents is an issue in general. As for your question about why that is, I would say that it is the fear of not being believed and, as the previous speaker highlighted, a fear of, and a lack of understanding about, the process. People are sometimes not 100 per cent sure whether the incident has happened, and the fear of being retraumatised as a result of the criminal justice process is a concern for many people who might find themselves in that situation.

We and Rape Crisis Scotland have been asking about pathways for people who suspect that they have been spiked to access health screening and testing to find out whether it has happened without their having to go to the police. We have raised the matter in other round-table meetings but, as far as I know, we have not had any answers. Access to testing to find out whether you have been spiked certainly would help.

There is certainly a culture of underreporting around spiking. I have to agree with Sally Mapstone that it is not just a student issue; indeed, we and Rape Crisis Scotland have seen as much in the calls to our helplines. We also need to move away from the culture of victim blaming and putting it on victims to prevent such situations from happening and to keep themselves safe. As Hilary Sloan has said, there needs to be a shift in that respect.

A pretty unusual situation cropped up at the back end of October with regard to spiking by injection, but it is important to remember that by far the most prevalent method of spiking is additional unwanted alcohol. Moreover, as we start to move out of the pandemic and the unusual situation with lockdowns and so on, house parties will become an issue again. The picture over the past couple of years has been different, but we would ordinarily see spiking by additional alcohol as the most prevalent method and house parties as an area of concern.

We feel that the way forward is to provide as many referral pathways as possible to ensure that people get the support and help that they need and to give victims who suspect that they have been spiked access to testing to find out whether that is the case without their having to report to the police.

The Convener: You—

Kate Wallace: We should also remember that there is no specific crime of spiking, which does not help in gauging prevalence.

I am sorry if I interrupted you, convener.

The Convener: No—you made a very important point. You mentioned the settings where there is what you have described as additional unwelcome alcohol, which I presume is put into soft drinks and such like—

Kate Wallace: Or you are given, say, triples that you do not want or have not asked for.

The Convener: What is the most likely setting for that? Are you suggesting that that is more likely to happen in a private setting?

Kate Wallace: We are talking about multiple settings—it is not just one or the other. I just wanted to remind people that spiking can occur outwith nightclubs, pubs and the night-time economy and that it is an issue in private residences, too. It is not a case of either/or or of its happening more here and less there—people need to be aware that it can happen wherever. As Sally Mapstone has said, we need to address the perpetrators directly and tell them that Scotland is not the sort of country in which that kind of behaviour is seen as acceptable.

Superintendent Sloan: I want to reiterate some of the points that have been made. We in Police Scotland have focused our communications on perpetrator behaviour, because it is the perpetrators, not the victims, whom we need to communicate with. As a victim-centred organisation, we have been completely victim focused on the issue from the very start.

The partnership working and collaboration involving all the blue-light services and the people represented around the table today have been absolutely key for us, and we have shared the communications toolkit that we have pulled together with all the partners around the table. We have ensured that the messaging is consistent in encouraging people to report incidents to us. Ideally, we want people to be confident about reporting such matters to Police Scotland, whether that be the day after or a week after, and I think that our collaboration with the partners has really helped that piece.

Nevertheless, we need to keep working on that. The networks have been established, we are all communicating with each other on a fairly regular basis, and we are all sighted on any issues that we need to raise with each other. For me, though, the key is public confidence and people feeling confident enough to report incidents to us. Every single incident that is reported will be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly.

More important, we have issued a “What to expect” document for people who might be reticent about reporting to Police Scotland in order to put their minds at rest about what will happen when they report an incident to us. That document, which has been widely disseminated, should, I

hope, make a real difference for individuals who might be a bit fearful of reporting in the first instance.

The Convener: There was a comment earlier from Ellen MacRae, I think, about reporting. How would a victim—someone who has had such a thing perpetrated on them—normally report? Would they go to a hospital or to the venue? What is the typical reporting journey?

Superintendent Sloan: It depends on the individual and on what they wish to do. We have bystander awareness training, which we have shared with the staff of licensed premises and which encourages them to look out for signs that a person is in distress. The person could report to somebody in the licensed premises, the Scottish Ambulance Service, their local accident and emergency department, or the police via 101 or 999. People report in various ways. The key is in making sure that those communications come back to Police Scotland so that we are sighted on them. If the individual agrees, we will then become involved, provide the wraparound for those individuals, and help to signpost them to further assistance, should that be required.

Martha Williams: I will make a quick point. One of the key issues in the conversation is the fact that there is such a lack of clarity on the procedure for reporting spikings. That goes back to education and to the culture behind the incidents.

As a student, I am someone to whom it could very well happen, and I know a lot of people to whom it has happened. Nobody really knows the exact procedure—that is, there is no clear-cut procedure. That is a fundamental issue because, if that is not being widely publicised as something that should be followed afterwards, people will not do that. They will have already experienced a trauma, so they may not be completely motivated to do all the research to find the specific thing that they have to do afterwards. From here on out, there should be a focus on establishing a clear procedure on who and where to go to. I am sure that there is such a procedure, but it needs to be more integrated into the education on the topic.

The Convener: It is apt that we turn to Jill Stevenson, from the University of Stirling, who is also director of the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education.

Jill Stevenson (Association of Managers of Student Services In Higher Education): I hope that I can pick up on some of those points. Notwithstanding the valid points that have been made about the issue being not just for students but for wider society, I want to reassure the committee about how seriously universities take it. Other than prevention, which we can talk about more, our primary focus is on encouraging any

student who has been a victim of any type of gender-based violence, including spiking, to come forward and report, and on ensuring that we support them effectively.

Almost all universities have been increasing their efforts in introducing centralised reporting systems to encourage people to come forward with reports, either named or anonymous, which will be dealt with centrally. Almost all of us—if not all of us—have trained up staff who can take those reports and who are trained in disclosures. Some of the institutions have what are called SVLOs—sexual violence liaison officers—who are trained to take those reports. Their role is then to work with the people who have come forward with disclosures, basically to ascertain what support they need. People may want to report formally to the university or to the police, or they may just want counselling or emotional support. That is what we have been investing in to help us to respond to those reports, as well as investing in the reporting systems that I mentioned.

There has also been a lot of training of first responders. Although our SVLOs have more training in dealing with disclosures, we understand that a spiking could be reported to anybody in the university—for example, to a personal tutor or to somebody in the person's accommodation, such as a cleaner. We are therefore investing in training to help staff to understand where to direct students who have disclosed something like that, so that they can get support.

09:45

Communication and awareness raising have been really important for us because of the transient populations that we have and all the valid points that have been made about concerns about reporting. A lot of work has been put into encouraging students to feel comfortable about coming forward—the point has already been made about not using victim-blaming sentiments but providing encouragement and support. There are examples of those campaigns being run in pre-entry, welcome and induction programmes in universities to get that awareness into people's minds early in their student journey and throughout it.

Hilary Sloan is right about communicating to the perpetrators that it is their fault and their responsibility and that it will not be tolerated in universities and wider society. However, there is an important message for victims as well—that they will be believed and supported, so they should please come forward. There are some good examples of messages that have gone out to students, and not just about spiking. During the pandemic, there were messages that said that, even if they had been socialising when they

should not have been, they should not let that be a barrier to coming forward. They would not be judged for that and they would be supported. The same sort of messaging is now going out for spiking.

I know that we need to get on and that we might touch on some of this later, but I have one final point to make. Universities are part of a partnership approach to the problem, and partnership is vital. We are an important cog in the wheel, but the partnership approach across cities is important. I can talk more about examples of really good partnerships that are in place between us, the police and the night-time economy, which clearly has a role here.

The Convener: Martha Williams mentioned that young people have been locked in and locked down, and she gave that as one of the reasons for the uptick, which is very plausible. There was also a comment from Ellen MacRae, I think, about the endemic nature of gender-based violence. Will you comment on whether there has been an uptick across the board in relation to reported instances of gender-based or sex-based violence?

Jill Stevenson: It is a complex question, because there are many types of gender-based violence. I would probably defer to the police on prevalence. We know that all types of gender-based violence are underreported across society. In universities, our focus is on encouraging people to come forward. Some institutions have brought in reporting systems and they will be seeing increases, but it is a positive thing to see more people coming forward. However, the prevalence varies depending on the type of offence and the systems that are in place. I agree that there is underreporting across society, but, as I say, I defer to Police Scotland on the detail.

The Convener: Would Hilary Sloan like to make a quick comment on that? Then I will bring in Kaukab Stewart, who has a point to address to Mike Grieve and Andrew Green.

Superintendent Sloan: People having the confidence to report incidents to us, whether it is gender-based violence or any other crime, is key for us. We want people to come forward and report incidents to us. There was a discussion about a wee bit of confusion around how the incidents should be reported, but Police Scotland wants to hear from anybody who is the victim of any crime. It is really important to get that across—we want to hear from those individuals. Public confidence is key, as is working in collaboration with partners to increase public confidence and give people the courage to report incidents. It is then for us to provide victim-centred support to them as we undertake the investigation.

The Convener: For clarity, was the uptick in spiking that was seen in October around freshers week in line with a general trend in gender-based violence crimes?

Superintendent Sloan: I am not able to comment on whether there has been a general increase in gender-based violence. I said that spiking incidents traditionally increase around freshers week, so the spike at that time of the year is familiar to us. However, the volume was greater than in previous years.

The Convener: Yes—dramatically so, in fact.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I want to bring in Andrew Green. It is important to get the perspectives of the pubs and licensed trades on the matter. I am particularly interested in their perspectives on staff training and how the bystander model is working.

Andrew Green (Scottish Beer & Pub Association): Mike Grieve and I represent trade bodies, so we probably have similar perspectives.

We tell the pubs that are covered in our membership that spiking incidents are serious events and should be taken seriously when they are reported to staff. We also tell them that alert and well-trained staff are key to detecting the signs and behaviour of spiking and that it is important that, when people fall ill, staff know what to do about it.

Pubs should have safeguarding procedures as part of their wider framework for looking after their customers anyway, but we encourage them always to take reports to staff seriously and to activate their safeguarding procedures when incidents are reported. That could involve looking after the health of the customer, ensuring that they have their friends with them or ensuring that, if they want the police, the police are called. It also involves the venues ensuring that they accurately record and log such events so that there is some sort of evidence or trail if the police become involved later, as well as for any internal procedures to enable them to improve their own activities in looking after customers.

Spiking is taken extremely seriously, but it also falls within a wider remit of the general welfare and safeguarding of customers. Alert and well-trained staff are a key element in that. They need to know how to look out for the signs of spiking in customers and in the behaviour of other customers towards them, such as friends within groups. They also need to appreciate that spiking is a criminal offence. That includes alcohol spiking. Staff need to understand that spiking with extra measures of alcohol is a criminal offence, so that, if they are aware that it is going on, they stop it. That messaging is key across—

Kaukab Stewart: Do you consider that—I am sorry to speak over you. It is difficult not to do so in a virtual meeting, in which we overlap a little bit.

If Mike Grieve wants to add anything, I am happy for him to come in as well.

You keep records so that there is a trail, which is great. Has there been an increase in your record keeping? I mean an increase in your numbers—I am sorry for the clumsy wording.

Andrew Green: Perhaps I should clarify. We recommend that venues record incidents as part of their procedures. Whether a venue does or does not is entirely down to it.

That harks back to some of the earlier points about consistency. Some sort of consistent framework for how incidents are recorded and what should be recorded is essential. Otherwise, it is largely up to the venue what details staff take. They would probably make a judgment on what evidence would be useful based on prior experience and involvement with the police. They would take details such as when the incident happened, who they think was involved and whether any closed-circuit television footage was available.

You asked whether I had noticed any increase in reporting. No. As the superintendent commented, reported events of spiking increase around freshers week every year, but we did not hear from our members about any extra concerns this year, over and above their concerns in the past.

Spiking is serious and should be taken account of, but, from what I heard from members, we did not notice anything over and above previous years. That is not an official poll or a measurement; it is just anecdotal.

Kaukab Stewart: You said that it is good practice to keep records but that there is no compulsion to do so and no expectation that it will be done. What would be the industry's opinion if some sort of enforcement was brought in and venues did have to keep records? What would the industry feel about that?

Andrew Green: I think that we would want to know what was driving that. We have talked about consistency of reporting, and we do not have an accurate sense of how prevalent spiking is. Any legislative or mandatory requirement would have to be underpinned by solid evidence showing why that was being brought in. We would want to be happy that the evidence justified any regulation being brought in.

We should not be looking at spiking in isolation, as there are other welfare and safeguarding issues that can occur in venues, and they should also be recorded. Any framework that is adopted

should go wider than thinking only about drink spiking.

Kaukab Stewart: That is an important point if we are looking at gender-based violence.

Mike Grieve, do you want to come in?

Mike Grieve (Night Time Industries Association): I can add some context to what Andrew Green said. My organisation represents the late-night side of the hospitality sector, and there are different factors in play for us. There are mandatory incident reporting procedures for late-night venues. It is a licensing condition that all incidents of any sort are reported. Our members and our staff are very familiar with those procedures.

When used in conjunction with closed-circuit television, reporting creates a pretty robust system for checking back on any incident that may have happened on the premises or outside. Incidents that happen outside premises would not technically be the responsibility of the premises, but most venues take the duty of care very seriously.

The late-night economy has been at the forefront of training initiatives. We have worked on bystander training with various groups over the years. We have engaged with Police Scotland and other organisations. The issue has been, and will continue to be, taken very seriously.

That is the context for late-night venues. I agree with a lot of the comments that others have made. The problem of spiking is not unique to the student community, but there is a clear correlation between freshers week and a surge in reports of spiking. Some of us who are here have been involved in on-going discussions with the police, the Scottish Government and other bodies.

There was a surge in reports around Halloween. Our members told us that people had reported spiking incidents and the police also have that information. Martha Williams made a relevant point about people having been locked down for a couple of years. There was no freshers week in 2020, which made 2021 a double whammy. We saw that in our industry not only in relation to spiking but in connection with all sorts of behaviour and activities by students in the late-night economy.

There is a clear pathway from leaving school and university or college to coming into the big, bad, wider world, including going out with friends—all the stuff that we know people do. To a great extent, young people learn through their peers. The 2020 intake of students did not have the opportunity for peer learning, because there was no freshers week.

10:00

The point that I am trying to illustrate is that that definitely contributed to the upsurge in incidents—certainly in reported incidents—around Halloween. Therefore, in many respects, it is a very positive thing that it is being drawn into the public consciousness in this way. The upsurge in reporting has presented difficulties for many people, particularly in our industry, but it has drawn attention to the problem and has caused various groups, including the people around the table today, to take seriously some of the actions that are required.

I will go back to the procedures around these incidents. The consistency of the reporting of these incidents and the protocols around that are a key issue. Superintendent Sloan said that the police always encourage people to report incidents to them, which is correct, but we also have reporting to venues, to the ambulance service and to student services. We need clear pathways for victims or people who suspect that they are victims to report such incidents in ways that can be measured and tracked.

That is not to ignore the real difficulties involved in that. Testing, for instance, is not a simple process. Most of the substances that are believed to be involved in these incidents cannot be traced in the bloodstream after 24 hours. There is also conflict over the issue of needle spiking. Many experts have said that it is impossible to inject somebody with a needle with sufficient quantities of the types of substances to cause these effects, so there is still a great deal of uncertainty about what is really going on here. If I may be so bold, I would encourage the Scottish Government to introduce clear and simple protocols for venues, student services, students themselves and others in the community—without alarming people—to make those pathways clear to people.

Consistency in training is vital. At the moment, there is not a plethora of training agencies that can help with bystander training, for instance, and it is left to venues to locate those services for their employees. There should be a more concerted approach to providing easy access points, supported by the Government.

I am sorry that that was a long ramble, but I sat and waited to hear others' points first. I have got all that off my chest, now—thank you.

The Convener: Have you seen any evidence whatsoever of needle spiking across all the different businesses that you represent? Has anyone come forward with any evidence?

Mike Grieve: We have had reports that some people have reported needle spiking. It is nothing like as prevalent as—

The Convener: Were those reports from the venues that your association represents?

Mike Grieve: I know of a handful of venues where, around Halloween, there were reports of needle spiking. On each of those occasions, the police investigated and found absolutely no evidence of it. I hope that Superintendent Sloan can back this up, but, to my knowledge, there were no confirmed incidents of needle spiking in Scotland during that period.

The Convener: I will bring in Willie Rennie in a moment, but first I have another couple of questions for Mike Grieve and Andrew Green, on training. You mentioned staff training, so perhaps you could help me to understand a few things. What are staff looking for? If they see it, how do they intervene? What happens, and what do they do, if their intervention has no effect? Perhaps you could talk me through that.

Mike Grieve: Again, I am speaking only to the late-night economy, but in general staff are trained to watch out for all sorts of behaviours. Responsible premises try to keep potential perpetrators out as far as possible, and the front line of Security Industry Authority badged stewards is a vital component. Staff in the venue, such as bar staff, are trained to watch out for anybody who may be double-loading drinks. I agree that drink spiking is almost certainly the most prevalent form of spiking.

Let us say, for the sake of argument, that I went to the bar and ordered a drink for me and a triple vodka for my companion. That would ring an alarm bell. If somebody orders half a dozen shots of a spirit, our staff are trained to engage with them on where those drinks are going once they leave the bar. Staff are not just serving people willy-nilly. They might say, "Oh great, that's the third time that guy's been up and ordered six shots of tequila—I wonder what's going on there." Staff are very aware of that type of thing. Such awareness cannot be taken as universal, but it is certainly encouraged by the NTIA and by responsible operators of premises.

The Convener: What do staff do after they have noted that there is something suspicious going on, such as a pattern of buying shots or whatever?

Mike Grieve: The first port of call, depending on the staff member's seniority, would be to report it to either the charge hand on the bar or the manager of the venue—whoever is most local to whatever is going on. The manager would speak with the head steward, who would monitor the people who have been identified and generally keep an eye on the situation. As I said, our staff do that all the time; they are always watching for any signs of inappropriate behaviour of any sort.

It is important to note that, from a venue's perspective—quite apart from looking after the safety of the individual, which is our primary concern at all times—anything that becomes a problem will become a problem for the venue. No venue needs to end up in a situation where three out of their six stewards are effectively taken out of the game for 45 minutes while they wait for an ambulance to arrive. That is what happens, and it puts pressure on from all sides.

Generally speaking, in late-night venues, things are run as a well-oiled machine. I am very confident in saying that the vast majority of late-night operators have such protocols in place.

The Convener: A typical venue would have a pretty open communication channel with the police on duty in the locality where it is situated. Is that correct?

Mike Grieve: Absolutely. Again, in most venues of the type that I am describing, all the stewards are in radio communication with each other and with the venue manager and, generally speaking, someone such as the charge hand on the bar would also have a radio link to the stewards and to the manager. These things happen quite quickly. From there, there would be communication with the police—the manager or one of the door stewards would simply use a mobile phone to make a 911 call or, depending on the location, attract attention from police who are about on the street. The lines of communication are pretty straightforward.

What can be an issue with the police is attendance times. As with stewards in a venue, the police can be occupied with one particular incident in, say, another part of the city centre, and it can be difficult for them to attend as quickly as we—or, indeed, they—might like. The same goes for ambulance services.

The Convener: The availability of first responders and blue-light services across the board is certainly an ancillary issue. Your point is well made.

Willie Rennie has been patiently waiting to jump into the conversation.

Willie Rennie: Not at all, convener—I have found the discussion fascinating.

What is coming through very clearly is that the bigger threat, which has been present for a long time now, is this particular use of alcohol and plying victims with it in order to gain control. Is there a danger that with all the recent publicity there has been an unfair—or, I should say, incorrect—focus on drug spiking with needles or in drinks, when all we want is for people to be alert to traditional drink spiking through extra alcohol, triple shots and so on?

My second question is probably for our student witnesses, Victim Support Scotland and others. Are the pubs and venues meeting the standard that Mike Grieve has set out with regard to what you expect from staff in dealing with these incidents? If not, how do we change that situation?

Kate, do you want to go first, given that you were the first to talk about triple shots of alcohol?

Kate Wallace: We need to understand spiking across the board, which is why I raised the point about alcohol. I should also clarify the legal situation in Scotland, because it is different from that in England. Andrew Green has talked about the crime of spiking. In Scotland, though, there are two crimes associated with it: first, administering a substance for sexual purposes, and, secondly, drugging. The legal position in Scotland is therefore different, because, as I said earlier, there is no specific crime of spiking per se if the incident does not fall into the two categories that I have outlined.

As I have said, this is not a case of either/or. We need to be alert and aware of everything to do with this. I agree with some of the comments that have been made about reporting and referral pathways, and we need to reach a position where we have a trauma-informed response across a number of organisations, with people being given choice about and control over whom they want to report to and when they want to do so and everyone being clear about that to ensure that we have a no-wrong-door approach. As Hilary Sloan has said, we are making moves in that direction, but I do not think that we are there yet.

Unfortunately, the conversation that we just had about injection spiking is not helpful for victims or, indeed, potential victims. We have spent a lot of time talking about the need to move away from victim blaming, but we also need to be really careful about how that message comes across to people, who fear that they might be dismissed and who are not quite sure what has happened to them. As someone said earlier, some of these substances leave people's systems quite quickly. Saying that there is absolutely no evidence to support a claim is not the same as saying that it did not happen and will never happen. We need to be really careful about our communications and messaging in that respect to ensure that we are truly encouraging people to come forward and report incidents. There is really effective support for people from a number of different places, depending on what they might choose, and everybody is clear about what the next steps should be.

I come back to my point about people being able to access testing and screening without having to report to the police, because I think that that is really important. For me, what is coming out

of this morning's discussion is the need for a trauma-informed approach across the board. We have made some headway on that, but we still have quite a bit of work to do on it together.

On your question about pubs and venues, other witnesses are probably better placed to respond to that than I am. The feedback that we get is that the situation is patchy, but others may be able to give you some more detail on that.

10:15

Sally Mapstone: Kate Wallace has made a lot of the points that I wanted to make, but I will add a couple of comments. There is quite a lot of evidence that the victims of spiking are predominantly women, and we have not explicitly acknowledged that point today. It explains, to some extent, the association of spiking with gender-based violence. We need to take that on board, because it is one of the broader contexts in which we need to consider spiking.

I go back to another point that Willie Rennie made. Given the association with gender-based violence, we often associate spiking with malice and assault, but—as a number of colleagues have said today—it can also take place in a misguided attempt to bolster a good night out. The education side is incredibly important in enabling us to build a cultural awareness that that type of thing is not fun and that people risk coming into the zone of being accused of a crime.

Kate Wallace is right to keep on raising the issue of spiking in a criminal context in Scotland. The context is not that clear, as spiking comes under other types of crime rather than being an offence in its own right. That issue would merit further inquiry.

I have one other point, to build on what a couple of colleagues have said. Students have fed back to us that, in trying to build a culture of support, they increasingly hear other students say that they would like to have testing strips available. That sounds like a nice simple solution and a way to engage with the problem, but the whole testing-strip culture is complicated. Some tests test for only one drug, which may not be relevant in a particular community. Some tests are for a variety of drugs but are not widely available.

In addition, tests are quite expensive. In my institution, we have stockpiled testing kits, but we are not readily handing them out because they are expensive. They cost about 40p a strip, and they come in batches of 15. If they are being administered via a students' association, that can add up to quite an expensive bill. In trying to build a culture of protection and prevention, we also need to get into some of the resourcing issues.

Jill Stevenson: I have a couple of quick observations on points that have been raised, and a more substantive point about bystander training. A point was made about the fact that incidents increased during freshers week, and I want to give my perspective on that. Students may be the victims, but they are not necessarily the perpetrators. Predators could see opportunities with the fresher population, or—to go back to the point that Sally Mapstone just made—it could be about something else altogether.

The point was made that, because there were no freshers weeks during the pandemic, there were no opportunities to educate students. I want to come back on that point because, in our experience, the situation was quite the opposite. Universities were very much investing in communications, messaging and training on these issues in an online capacity, and they have really strengthened their online programmes in that regard. As I said earlier, work has gone into the induction and welcome process; I want to reassure the committee about that. We have definitely taken an alternative approach during the pandemic, and we will be working on a more blended approach as we go forward.

With regard to bystander intervention and training, Stephanie Callaghan raised the issue of training in those protocols for young people because they can be bystanders as well as potential victims or perpetrators. Universities and colleges have been investing in that area as part of their training, and some have done a lot of training on areas such as consent. One of the most common areas of training is about taking a bystander approach to GBV more widely.

A point that has perhaps not yet been raised is that the equally safe in colleges and universities core leadership group has just developed a joint strategy for preventing and tackling gender-based violence in universities. The group is now identifying the priorities for the coming year with a range of partners, some of whom are represented here today. If we are looking at the priorities around training, that strategy contains those, and they can be rolled out across universities.

Training is also needed in licensed premises. I keep going back to the fact that it is not just about universities. I think that Mike Grieve commented on the availability of providers and whether those could be sought. Universities can be helpful in that, and organisations that work to tackle gender-based violence and violence against women have been engaging with many providers on bystander training, so there is a suite of providers that could be utilised.

I will echo Sally Mapstone's point. We have not mentioned resources yet, but, clearly, it is a resource-intensive area. Universities have

transient populations. We are committed to delivering the comprehensive training and support that needs to be put in place, but there are cycles of students coming in. Sally mentioned the issue of the provision of testing through student unions, which, again, requires resources. Also, of course, student unions need to invest in training, too. As I said, it is a resource-intensive area. It would be useful to continue to discuss that.

The only significant investment from the Scottish Government in preventing and tackling gender-based violence in universities and colleges was back in about 2016 with the development of the equally safe in higher education toolkit at the University of Strathclyde. As I said, the approach now is through the equally safe leadership group. Therefore, discussions about resourcing will be important, as will how we prioritise that to focus on the actions that will make the greatest impact across the sector and in wider society.

Mike Grieve: I want to add that there is a perception that there is a need for mandatory searching on entry to late-night premises. I want to make clear that, as I said in the meeting chat sidebar, it is a condition of the licence that patrons are searched on the way in.

I will respond quickly to what Kate Wallace said about the issue of needle spiking. There is absolutely no sense in which I or anyone else within our industry would blame victims. Victim blaming is a serious concern—I completely agree with you—and I am not suggesting for one minute that anyone who suspects that they have been the victim of needle spiking should not report it. I was simply responding to Mr Rennie's question about whether we have seen reports of that. I can only answer that question honestly, and the honest answer is that we have had a small number of reports of it but that none of them have been substantiated. I am merely stating the facts as we know them.

On Jill Stevenson's point about the freshers situation, the point that I was making was not that universities, student associations or anyone else was negligent in any way with regard to the advice that they were making available to students. I was referring to the student-to-student peer learning, which is part of the student journey. That is what the students missed, and I was not for a second suggesting that universities have been lax in any way. I have a son who was part of that 2020 student intake, so I understand the issues around that personally, quite apart from professionally.

The Convener: I will continue that theme. Martha Williams, as part of the girls night in campaign, you have been boycotting bars and clubs. Is that a general or specific boycott? Why did your campaign decide on taking that direct action? Perhaps Ellen MacRae could also

comment on that, because we have not heard from Ellen in a while and I want to make sure that we hear her voice.

Martha Williams: Towards the middle of October, when the incidents were escalating, we—by which I mean my student community—felt as though nobody was taking the allegations seriously.

Specifically, nightclubs were not, to our knowledge, doing anything about reforming the way in which they were handling these situations or looking after the safety of their patrons. To get some attention, we decided to organise a one-night boycott of all nightclubs. In the build-up to that boycott, the girls night in campaign gained a lot of traction and attention, and we were able to start a conversation about the things that could be done to tackle spiking incidents.

Instead of just boycotting all nightclubs, which would not have been a productive solution, I gathered data and suggestions from our followers and supporters on the things that nightclubs could implement to make their patrons feel safe in the environments that they are facilitating. In an open letter that I sent out to as many establishments I could think of in Edinburgh, where I am based, I detailed all the things that my peers and everyone who had had experience of the nightclub industry in Edinburgh wanted nightclubs to enforce.

In short, we had a one-night boycott to get the conversation going, and I think that that we achieved that.

The Convener: What response did you get to your open letter?

Martha Williams: Some establishments responded and others released their own statements about what they were going to implement. We felt that that was a productive collaboration. However, some nightclubs in Edinburgh did not respond and, to my knowledge, have not implemented anything productive since the increase in spiking incidents.

The response was varied and, of course, you never know the extent to which establishments are taking performative action just to ensure that they do not lose any business. However, we saw some change in the culture in nightclubs. As someone who has attended nightclubs since then, I can tell you that I have seen some productive changes.

The Convener: What changes have you seen?

Martha Williams: The increase in staff attention has definitely made me feel safer. Knowing that there are people watching out for your safety when you are not necessarily in a complete state of awareness makes me feel that these sorts of incidents can be prevented. Not only do patrons feel safer, but perpetrators will—you would hope—

be more hesitant about committing such acts if they know that they are being watched and that more attention is being paid to these possibilities.

I know that the issue of increased security is quite controversial—indeed, it has led to a controversial debate on my own platform. After all, you do not want to give too much power to people who might abuse it by acting on their own prejudices and biases. At the same time, however, it is important to make perpetrators aware that they cannot bring substances such as drugs and maybe needles into establishments. Security is an issue that certainly needs to be discussed.

There have also been a lot of creative responses, such as the use of lids on drinks and other things that have focused on drink spiking. The general consensus, however, is that staff need to exercise a high level of diligence in what they are doing to ensure that everyone in their establishments feels safe.

The Convener: Does what you have heard from Andrew Green and Mike Grieve reinforce your confidence that the industry is taking this matter seriously?

Martha Williams: Definitely. I think that, at a higher level, the authorities are acting with diligence. However, nightclub leadership on this sort of thing needs to be monitored more. I do not doubt that things are being implemented and that processes are in place, but some establishments are not necessarily up to the standard that they need to be at.

The Convener: Would you like to add anything, Ellen?

10:30

Ellen MacRae: Yes, please. Speaking specifically about Edinburgh, because that is the place that I know best, students are aware, from online forums and talking among friends, of nightclubs that feel more dodgy. There seems to be a collection of nightclubs—not to say that they are linked—that students are more wary and cautious of going to, because of their perception that those clubs do not take things as seriously or because a number of incidents have occurred there and there do not seem to have been dramatic changes in acknowledging or addressing that.

Edinburgh University Students Association has its own club night, and I am very grateful that we have not had any reported incidences of spiking in our venue. In acknowledgment of the increase in cases and of students and young people feeling more uncertain and unsafe about being in nightclub spaces, we have done some of the things that Martha Williams has mentioned.

We make sure that our attendees know that there is a wellbeing space for them and that, if they are feeling unwell or just need some support, they can receive support directly in our venue. We can even offer them safe transport home. I suppose that part of being a student association is that we can offer that service. Our security team will not just expel someone from the venue because they seem intoxicated; they will make sure that the person is feeling okay and that they are safe and able to make their way home safely. Our attendees can also access free water from tamper-free dispensers through our staff.

Attendees also require a ticket, which is linked to their student account. That is available to us to do as a students association, to ensure that we know who has been in our spaces so that we can protect them.

I am particularly interested in hearing about what support is available to those who have already experienced spiking. We have been talking a lot about prevention in the future and what we can continue doing, but how can we support those who have already experienced spiking and gender-based violence through spiking? How can we make sure that they feel that their mental health and wellbeing are still being supported, especially if they are a member of a university or a young persons community? How do we make sure that they still feel able to enjoy the city and the campus that they are part of? I do not know whether the answer is there, but I would be keen to hear it.

The Convener: Let us not lose that point. I see that Kate Wallace wants to come back in, but I will bring in Stephanie Callaghan before her. Before that, however, I have a question for Ellen on the role of social media. You discussed the reputations of certain venues. How do you assess the impact of social media on this subject, specifically around the issue of reputation?

Ellen MacRae: Social media can have a huge influence on reputation and people's perceptions. Even without attending it, you can learn so much about a nightclub by reading things on public forums on social media, especially if the pages are linked to your community. For example, we have anonymous posting platforms within Edinburgh university through Facebook. That way students know that the people who post are people like them who are living in the city that they are in. Students trust what they read.

It definitely feeds into the nervousness that people feel about being in the city. I never felt unsafe in the city of Edinburgh until I started seeing such a mass increase of people's testimonies being publicly shared on social media platforms, which can reach so many people. I would not want to change that. I want people to

know. I would want to know what people are experiencing in the city and where those areas are, so I can keep myself safer.

It is absolutely a fact that, with the increase in social media testimonies, and without matching statements from local authorities and nightclubs that acknowledge those issues, people feel less safe and they can feel more cautious while walking around in a city that they once loved and felt very safe in.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I do not disagree with what has been said about doing something for victims now, but my question is about what the next steps are. We have had the ministerial round table, which involved the police, NHS 24, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Victim Support Scotland, the Night Time Industries Association, Rape Crisis Scotland, and other public organisations. However, I do not see anything in our papers about next steps, particularly in relation to what Mike Grieve said about evidence-based reporting protocols, possibly at a national level, by which nightclubs can be provided with some information that is easy to follow, from people who are doing similar things.

Is a forum or a group already in place? We have the equally safe in colleges and universities core leadership group, but is there an overarching group that takes into account all the different organisations that are looking at doing such work, and that looks at what those protocols might be and at what protocols there might be for bystanders or young people themselves?

The Convener: Jill Stevenson wants to come in on that.

Jill Stevenson: I wanted to come in about support, which I might talk about in a second, if that is okay.

The equally safe in colleges and universities core leadership group, which I had mentioned, has just put together a strategy and is now working on its annual operational plan for priorities. Certainly, reporting protocols—standardising, if not the method, the consistency, quality and visibility of reporting, and people's awareness of it—is a core priority for that group, along with—

The Convener: I noticed that you and Mike Grieve were having a discussion in the chat box, which, of course, is not being broadcast. Will you just recap on that? You and he seem to be in the same space when it comes to establishing consistent reporting protocols.

Jill Stevenson: Sure. My point to Mike—to which he came back to say yes, we should discuss—was that, despite the equally safe group, which focuses mainly on the university and college

sector, which is a priority, I could not comment on for a for reporting in licensed premises and in the night-time economy. Both of us think that there are valuable discussions to be had on how we link up on that.

As I have mentioned, there are already good examples of partnerships in some of the cities, such as the fearless Glasgow and the fearless Edinburgh initiatives, and the Stirling GBV partnership, which liaises not just with the university but with all the key partners across the city and the night-time economy on how we might work together—

The Convener: So, in answer to Stephanie Callaghan's point, there are vehicles by which the discussion is carried forward, beyond those more public ones.

Jill Stevenson: Yes. All local authorities have a violence against women and girls partnership, or a gender-based violence partnership. That would be the key forum for city-wide or regional approaches to looking at the issue.

Stephanie Callaghan: Is there nothing overarching that at a national level? Is such a thing needed?

Jill Stevenson: As I have said, it certainly exists for the university sector—in the equally safe group, which also feeds into the regional levels.

Stephanie Callaghan: But is there no overarching, national, multi-agency approach? Is that missing? I am sorry if I was not making myself clear.

Jill Stevenson: You would probably need to ask others what for a there are. Obviously, there is the Scottish Government's equally safe strategy, which, in its widest sense, is looked after by a higher level group, so there is a forum there. The equally safe colleges group falls out from that and, as I have said, there are regional groups. The national forum will be chaired by the Scottish Government or a minister.

Is it okay for me to make my point about support, or do you want to ask further questions?

The Convener: Please carry on, and we will then bring in Kate Wallace.

Stephanie Callaghan: That is great, Jill. Thank you.

Jill Stevenson: My point about support will not take long. We know that some people come forward immediately to report what has happened, but people often take a long time to come forward, for lots of good reasons, which have already been addressed. Universities, in particular, are working on having that support in place. The sexual violence liaison officers that I have mentioned a couple of times have been intensively trained not

just on taking disclosures but on providing a sensitive, trauma-informed approach.

Their role will also be to refer people to other types of support, either in universities or externally. For example, my own university in Stirling has partnerships in place with Rape Crisis, Victim Support and Women's Aid, to name just a few. Rape Crisis and Victim Support also come on to campus so that people can access their clinics. I know that such action is common across a number of universities.

I will segue slightly into wider support and mental health and counselling support. Again, those two areas are linked and, as the committee will know, investing in mental health and counselling support is a high priority for universities. All universities have been investing in their mental health strategies and associated staffing. The Scottish Government has also provided welcome investment in counsellors in universities in the past couple of years. Between them, the universities' and the Scottish Government's investment have had some positive effects on mental health and wellbeing support for students. We are starting to see good reductions in waiting times, so we need to think about how we can continue that funding and those approaches.

As we know, national health service and specialist services waiting times are extremely long for mental health support and for specialist support in relation to sexual violence. I reiterate the point that, although universities are putting in a lot of investment and work, there is a danger of their being seen as filling in the gaps in wider services such as NHS and specialist services. It is important that we do not lose sight of that.

Kate Wallace: I will come back to the point that was made about an overarching group. Police Scotland has been running a group with partners, but it is not of the same magnitude as the ministerial round table. The committee has heard that there are different sectoral groups involving different partners. However, my understanding is that there is not—if you like—an implementation group that follows on from the ministerial round table and involves the type of people that were involved in that group. That was certainly the first time that we had been involved in as broad a group as that.

I also again make the point about bearing in mind that—as was mentioned—not all spiking relates to an intention around sexual assault and not all of it is happening in university and college settings. It is therefore important to think about an overarching group that would mean that there are robust and clear pathways around reporting and support, no matter the avenue or the forum. That is a helpful point.

I echo the point about the support that has been made available. We support victims of all types of crime, whether it is reported to the police or not. We are an organisation with a very broad remit and we work across the whole of Scotland. However, the committee will be aware of other organisations that have more specific areas of focus. For example, Rape Crisis is in that space and supports victims of serious sexual assault, and there are a number of third sector organisations in this area. We have helplines, and we receive calls on the issue. We also have local community support that can be put in place.

One of the things that concerned me during a conversation at one of the round tables was when I asked the Ambulance Service about its referral mechanisms for people it has attended to provide a first response and what it does afterwards. Its response was that it provides information to the police. However, it does not appear to have in place a referral protocol with other third sector organisations or anyone else to provide emotional support afterwards. I would therefore like to see that developed as an area of focus so that people can be provided with appropriate support at any time.

I agree with the point that NHS mental health services and other specialist support services are very stretched, which is challenging for all of us as organisations that are providing emotional support but not necessarily counselling, for example. The pandemic has certainly not helped with that.

Another point on reporting is that the response that people get all the way through the process is really important. We have focused a lot on health and on immediate responses by venues, for example, but there is also the issue of how the criminal justice system treats people all the way through. The lack of convictions for spiking, the fear of victim blaming and the feeling that the justice system is not trauma informed do not help.

10:45

Victim Support Scotland and other organisations are increasingly concerned about the delays in the justice system, which put people off from reporting. That is a big concern. There must be a systemic approach to tackling that and getting it right so that people are not put off coming forward and do not drop out as the process progresses.

We work closely in the criminal justice system and we have raised the issue in a number of forums. As much as there are delays in the NHS, the delays in the criminal justice system are massive and that is not helpful in relation to spiking either.

The Convener: You said some important things about the devastating impact that that has on the

mental health and overall wellbeing of the victims of spiking crimes.

I will come back to the concept of crime in a minute, but, first, I will bring in Ellen MacRae, who wanted to make a comment about health services in the context of the discussion about support.

Ellen MacRae: I am sure that everyone is aware of how stretched university mental health services are, but I also wanted to share some recent data that the University of Edinburgh collected in December 2021 about the students' ability even to access general practitioner services in Edinburgh.

We have heard testimony or reports of students who were really struggling, so we surveyed around 2,000 students, 60 per cent of whom said that they were registered with a GP. That is not nearly as high as we want it to be. Of those who had registered, 13 per cent needed to try three or four practices to find one that was able to admit them. Of those who are not registered with a GP in Edinburgh, 42 per cent have attempted to find one and not been successful.

The lack of capacity in our GP services imposes a huge challenge on young people who live in Edinburgh as university students accessing health services beyond those that the university is able to offer and struggles to offer due to the capacity issue. We have the numbers to show that not nearly enough of them have been able to register, or are registered, with a general practice.

The Convener: That is useful and insightful.

There have been a number of discussions about national structures—bringing people together under one roof, as it were. I see that Hilary Sloan has made some comments about that in the chat box. It would be useful to get them into the *Official Report*.

Superintendent Sloan: I reiterate that there is a command structure in place that is headed by Assistant Chief Constable Gary Ritchie. Within that command structure, there is a blue-light group, for want of a better term. The partners group that I mentioned at the start of the meeting sits below that.

I suggested in the chat bar that those networks and relationships, which have already been established at a national level, could be used as the basis for the continuing work to make progress on some of the issues that have been discussed today. I have already had that discussion at a previous partners meeting. A lot of the future messaging will become business as usual among all the parties that are round the table. It might be a good opportunity to use that structure as a starting point.

The Convener: Does the stakeholder group that you are describing include all the organisations on this round table, for example?

Superintendent Sloan: Yes, more or less. It has student representation and includes representatives from licensed premises and various third sector organisations, such as Victim Support Scotland and Rape Crisis Scotland. They are all represented at the meeting.

The Convener: I know that Willie Rennie wanted to come back in. What I see in the chat box suggests that things might have moved on, but I do not want to lose the point that he wanted to make. It is important that we get everything on the record.

Ah—I see that he is not at his desk. That is okay. I should have checked with him before I said anything.

I should say that we will lose Sally Mapstone at the top of the hour, as she has another commitment. We are grateful for the time that we have had with her. I note, though, that in her opening comments, she intimated that she would say something more at some point about working with young people. Could you take the opportunity to do that now, Sally, before we lose your presence at this round-table session?

Professor Mapstone: Thank you very much, convener. I think that the discussion has been really useful, and we have moved the conversation on a lot.

Before I revert to the point that you referred to, I want to reiterate the value of existing structures in engaging with this issue. There is a lot of expertise around the table. Jill Stevenson has mentioned the importance of the equally safe group, which the Scottish Government is involved in, and I think that it is important that we draw and build on that group's work. From a regional and national perspective, the kinds of connections that Hilary Sloan has highlighted seem to be really important, too.

Going back to my initial point about students and young people being the victims of spiking, I think that we can make a distinction between the two, which I was keen to do, but it is also important that we read right across this. A lot of what we are talking about is consciousness raising with regard to how we lead our lives and how we show that we are responsible, kind and respectful of others. Surely that sort of general messaging is appropriate to everybody.

We, in universities—and indeed in colleges—feel that we have responsibilities that extend way outside our particular sector and that we can help model the kinds of behaviours that we want to encourage. My point was really more in that area:

we can look at the incidence of spiking as something that is unfortunately part of our culture but which we all have a responsibility to seek to redress. Although it is not exclusively a student phenomenon, we have a responsibility to work outwith as well as within our sector to tackle it.

The Convener: Rolling the discussion forward from that, I note that there has been a lot of discussion this morning about the fitness of our criminal law in relation to this subject matter. What is your view on that? It has been made clear a couple of times that there is no specific crime of spiking in statute—at least, it is not specifically called that—but do you think that there should be?

Professor Mapstone: As people always say in these circumstances, I am not a lawyer, but it seems to me a bit of problem that we do not have a specific offence that targets spiking. The equivalent legislation in England has its own limitations, given that spiking is badged under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, but our legislation does not refer specifically to it. At the bare minimum, that needs to be looked at, because specific references to spiking in legislation really could lead, again, to consciousness raising and give us something more to focus on in that context. As for whether and how we make spiking a specific offence, I think that the proposal is worth looking at.

The Convener: So, it should be part of some formal review.

Professor Mapstone: Yes, I think so. It would be useful to take a serious look at it and see whether we need to construct such an offence. Surely that is almost a necessary follow-on from this conversation.

The Convener: I want to bring in Kate Wallace on the same topic. You have already intimated your strong feelings on this matter. Do you want to elaborate on them?

Kate Wallace: I agree with Sally Mapstone. Given the conversation that we have had about the importance of people feeling confident to report and confident that they will be believed and the need for an appropriate response not only from a support system but within the criminal justice system, I think that it would be helpful to look at this matter and, indeed, find out what other jurisdictions do.

For example, in Scotland, stalking now has a specific offence attached to it, which makes a massive difference for victims and their perception of whether they will be believed and how seriously the matter will be taken. The conviction rate is also a cause for concern for people. I therefore agree with Sally that it should be examined further.

Martha Williams: I agree. Those are all really important points. There definitely needs to be an emphasis on victim blaming not being part of our culture anymore.

The Convener: Ellen MacRae? As you can tell, I am working my way around the table.

Ellen MacRae: I do not have any comments to add. I really agree with everything that Kate has said today, and I thank her for all her comments. What particularly struck me was the point that was raised around making sure that we do not dismiss reports of needle spiking, as well as the discussion around the damage that the media can do in relation to young people, women and non-binary and trans folk feeling as though they are not believed or supported in a bigger and wider system by saying that there is absolutely no evidence for it.

The Convener: Do you want to come back in, Kate? I see that you have put an R in the chat box.

Kate Wallace: Yes. I will come in on the point about legislation. The requirement around a sexual intent from an evidential point of view can be quite challenging for the police and the Crown, which is why it is worth looking at in more detail.

I also want to come back on the point that Hilary Sloan made about potentially extending the group that Police Scotland has set up. We would be more than happy to continue involvement in that and to turn it into an implementation-type group where—as Sally Mapstone said—we make best use of other forums and of what is being developed in other areas that may well translate across the piece.

The Convener: That sounds eminently sensible to me.

Does anyone else have a view on whether it would be helpful if there was a specific crime in law? I am looking to the industry representatives, Mike and Andrew, in particular. Welcome back, by the way, Andrew—we lost you for a bit there. Would it be helpful and useful in relation to the work that you are doing on safeguarding in the venues?

Andrew Green: A specific offence would, I hope, raise the confidence of anyone who wanted to report it that it would be taken seriously. It would also aid the consistency and accuracy of reporting. It would be a bonus on both of those levels, and it would certainly aid the industry and the trade.

Mike Grieve: I was going to say the same thing. Our colleagues south of the border face similar problems. I believe that there are three different crime categories in England that cover the issue. It can therefore be reported in the context of different crime categories, which is not helpful at all. Anything that streamlines that and keeps focus

goes hand in hand with the reporting protocols. When we have those, it will be possible to build an accurate picture of what is really going on. For instance, it would shed light on the needle spiking issue, which is very hard to quantify at the moment. Of course, nobody seeks to engage in any kind of victim blaming over that. It is about trying to pull information together so that we can act in concert with the relevant authorities to make sure that we are doing everything that we can.

11:00

Jill Stevenson: Legislation cannot hurt, and it would help with getting the numbers reported and having a better sense of prevalence. I would just say a word of warning, however: it has to be part of a suite of measures. As we know, when we have had legislation for other types of sexual offences, it has not been a panacea. Reporting and, indeed, conviction rates are low. Such a move will have a purpose in acting as a deterrent to some, but we cannot rely just on that. We have to increase people's confidence in reporting and, more important, the conviction rates.

The Convener: Given what Jill Stevenson has just said, I think that it would be worth going back to Hilary Sloan. What are the barriers to getting convictions in this specific area of needle and drink spiking? One thing I have picked up from this discussion, for example, is that it is hard to get evidence beyond the reporting.

Superintendent Sloan: As has been said, the individuals involved need to have the confidence to come to the police in the first instance. We have an investigative strategy that has been shared throughout the whole of Police Scotland, and it contains various mechanisms for getting information that could lead to a report going to the procurator fiscal. The issue, then, is how we get the case to court. There are issues in that respect, but we are really open to working with partners to overcome such barriers.

The key for me is in ensuring that people are confident about reporting incidents. Our investigative strategy will then take over, and we will go through all the different inquiries to get as much as evidence as possible, so that we can take perpetrators or offenders to court.

The Convener: Before we conclude this evidence-taking session, I want to see whether my MSP colleagues at this round-table meeting have anything to add. I am conscious that Willie Rennie wanted to come in earlier, but we were unable to bring him in. I see that he has come back to his desk. Do you want to make the point that you were going to make earlier, Willie?

Willie Rennie: I think that we have moved on, convener. It is clear that there is some excellent

practice going on in various institutions, much of which has been reflected in today's session, but I am not clear about how we are ensuring that everybody is applying that best practice. How do we target those who, through no fault of their own, might need extra help and support but are oblivious to the support that is available? How do we make that happen and ensure that everybody is like the people who are here today?

The Convener: Would anyone like to respond to Willie Rennie's comments? While you are thinking about them, I will ask Stephanie Callaghan to come in.

Stephanie Callaghan: Thinking about Willie Rennie's comments, I wonder whether council licensing could be an approach to the issue.

I know that we have covered the issue of drugs testing at venues to a degree, but does Martha Williams or Ellen MacRae have anything to say about that? I imagine that, for young people, a lot of the underreporting of these incidents and many of the associated issues and trauma arise from the confusion, fear and uncertainty that they feel, the ambiguity of not knowing what happened and a sense of helplessness about the situation. Drugs testing might improve reporting rates and help people to deal with the trauma. I realise, though, that it would be quite complex and that there are practical and financial aspects to take into account.

The Convener: Before I bring in James Dornan, I just want to thank Sally Mapstone for attending this round-table session. As we know, she could be here only until 11 o'clock, and I thank her for her time.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I can see the benefit of legislation with regard to the message that it sends out about the importance that we are giving to the issue, but what sometimes happens is that, in doing these things for the right reasons, we create a rod for our own backs. I worry that a bill on spiking would be a very complex piece of legislation, because where would we draw the line? Earlier, someone said that spiking drinks with alcohol is still by far the most common form of spiking. What would happen if you bought your mate a double without his permission, for example? Where would we draw the line? How would we target those who need to be targeted? I think that there would be difficulties with that.

In the past, I have supported legislation in order to send out a strong message. I can see that it would be useful to send out a strong message here, but I worry about the practical difficulties.

Kate Wallace: The first thing that I would say is that the legislation that we currently have is problematic, too. It is a case of looking at which

legislation is most helpful and least problematic. I would point to the stalking legislation. In particular, I would focus on the use of the word "unwanted" and would look at whether that could be applied to spiking.

There are issues with the legislation that we have when it comes to the underlying intention. That is where it might be helpful to look at something different. Off the top of my head, I cannot give you an easy answer on what is the least problematic piece of legislation from the point of view of the way in which it is worded, but—as I have said before and as others have said—a legislative approach is definitely worth pursuing. If we had a legislative structure that was without issue, we would not be asking for that and we would not be discussing it.

I think that further consideration needs to be given to the use of legislation. I would have thought that the drafting people would be the best ones to say how it should be worded.

Ellen MacRae: Once again, I agree with Kate Wallace. I think that legislation legitimises people's experiences and their fears around spiking and how unsafe they are in some spaces in the city.

I might have to have Stephanie Callaghan's question repeated, but I think that people's hesitancy about coming forward to report such instances comes from a lack of transparency around what the procedure looks like and a feeling that, when they make a report, that will not be accompanied by any additional support for their wellbeing and their mental health. It could be a very raw and exposing experience in which they might not even be believed, and nothing might come of it. A feeling that they would be just a playing piece in an emotionally exposing reporting process definitely disincentivises people from coming forward.

I emphasise the importance of having readily available mental health and wellbeing support for those who come forward, regardless of which method they choose to report through. As I said at the beginning, at the moment, it is very unclear to people whether they should report such incidents to the police, the nightclub, venue or bar, the university or the students association. That only adds to the barriers to people coming forward to report spiking.

Mike Grieve: I have a couple of quick points to make in response to Stephanie Callaghan about consistency of approach in the industry. The licensed trade bodies that are represented here are all slightly different. Our association represents the late-night economy. It is a non-funded members' association, so there is no resource there, no matter how much we might like to roll out

best practice beyond the immediacy of our own membership.

That could be improved through initiatives along the lines of the one that was introduced by Glasgow City Council between two and a half and three years ago, which involved the creation of a night-time economy commission, with input from different parts of the sector. Having a Scotland-wide structure in place would help and would be very useful. For example, there is a night-time economy adviser to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and that approach has been very effective in bringing together elements from that huge conurbation. That is why I said that creating a Scotland-wide body could be a useful way of bringing together best practice.

I will quickly respond to the point about where we draw the line in relation to someone getting their mate a double, for example. It is important to acknowledge that getting your mate a double, if he has not asked for it, crosses a line. In my opinion, there should be legislation in that regard because, otherwise, people will always say, "Och, I was just having a laugh with my mate." That would address the point, because, in this day and age, we must acknowledge that you cannot buy people double the amount of drink that they want, unless they have asked for that.

The Convener: That is a powerful point.

Bob Doris: I have followed the conversation this morning, which has been fascinating and very helpful. My question relates to Mr Dornan's suggestion that reviewing the law on spiking could be challenging and complex. Would there be a wider benefit to reviewing the legislation on spiking, or the lack of it? That might force the Government and wider society to—yet again—review Scotland's relationship with alcohol, which would involve engagement with women's groups, youth groups, the licensed sector, Police Scotland and wider society. Irrespective of the complexities, would there be a wider intrinsic value in holding a consultation to see what reviewing the legislation on spiking might look like?

Kate Wallace: I agree. That would be one of the benefits of a review. I agree with Mike Grieve that, in Scotland, we should not tolerate someone buying unwanted additional alcohol or substances for other people. I also agree with the points that have been made about Scotland's relationship with alcohol and substances. Earlier, Sally Mapstone talked about Scotland's definition of a good night out. We should think about what can be done to enhance understanding of what steps over the line. I think that a review would be useful.

James Dornan: I would like to come back on that point. First, I am a non-drinker, so I do not go up to the bar to buy doubles for my mates.

However, what we have said highlights the difficulties, because we are talking about changing the whole culture for people of a certain generation who think that they are doing the right thing but are doing the wrong thing. I agree with everything that has been said on that point. If any legislation is introduced, education has to be a massive part of it—if not beforehand, certainly as the measures are introduced.

The Convener: I agree with that.

Jill Stevenson: I agree with everything that has been said in the past few minutes. There is value in exploring the issue. I reiterate the point that I made about that being part of the bigger picture, which supports the point that has just been made. It is about education, communication and having a whole strategy, as well as being about legislation.

The Convener: I think that we have come to a very natural conclusion to this morning's round-table discussion. I can speak only personally, but it has been really interesting and valuable to hear each of the witnesses talk about the issue from their perspective. It has been heartening to hear the degree of unanimity on the next steps and how different stakeholders can work together. We will watch with interest to see what happens next. A lot of what we have heard is greatly encouraging.

I thank Jill Stevenson, Ellen MacRae, Martha Williams, Mike Grieve, Superintendent Hilary Sloan, Andrew Green, Sally Mapstone and Kate Wallace for their time. Your contributions are very much appreciated and valued by the entire committee.

11:15

Meeting continued in private until 11:49.

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