

# **COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 10 September 2003  
(*Morning*)

Session 2

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## **COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE** **2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting 2003, Session 2**

### **CONVENER**

\*Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

### **DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
\*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)  
Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
\*Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
\*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)

### **COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES**

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green)  
Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP)  
John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

\*attended

### **THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:**

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Deputy Minister for Communities)

### **CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Jim Johnston

### **SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK**

Gerald McNally

### **ASSISTANT CLERK**

Jenny Goldsmith

### **LOCATION**

The Chamber



## Scottish Parliament

### Communities Committee

*Wednesday 10 September 2003*

*(Morning)*

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

### Subordinate Legislation

**The Convener (Johann Lamont):** I welcome everyone to the second meeting in 2003 of the Communities Committee. Stewart Stevenson has indicated that he will be slightly late.

Agenda item 1 is on subordinate legislation. I welcome Mary Mulligan, the Deputy Minister for Communities, and the officials who are accompanying her for consideration of the item: Roger Harris, Jean Waddie and Katie Wood.

The committee will note that we are dealing with five Scottish statutory instruments this morning. The first three are subject to the affirmative procedure, so the deputy minister is required under rule 10.6.2 of standing orders to propose by motion that the draft instruments be approved. She will therefore be with us for consideration of the first three instruments.

#### **Draft Housing Grants (Assessment of Contributions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003**

**The Convener:** The first instrument before us is the draft Housing Grants (Assessment of Contributions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003. Members have received copies of the draft regulations and accompanying documentation. I ask the minister to speak briefly to the regulations, but not to move the motion yet.

**The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan):** Would it be acceptable if I spoke to the draft Housing Grants (Assessment of Contributions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 and the draft Housing Grants (Minimum Percentage Grant) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 together, or do you want me to take them separately?

**The Convener:** Could you take them separately? That would be easier.

**Mrs Mulligan:** Okay. Grants for the improvement or repair of private housing are made by local authorities under part 13 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 amends those provisions in a number of ways. The most significant is to introduce a

national test of resources to assess the amount that the applicant can contribute to the costs of the work. That is underpinned by a system of minimum percentage grants so that, in specified circumstances, all applicants are eligible to receive a certain level of grant, regardless of their income. The draft Housing Grants (Assessment of Contributions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 and the draft Housing Grants (Minimum Percentage Grant) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 implement the detail of those provisions.

The purpose of the draft Housing Grants (Assessment of Contributions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 is to ensure that public funds are targeted to those on the lowest incomes. We want home owners to recognise their responsibility for the condition of their property. However, we realise that public assistance is necessary in some circumstances.

When the regulations were being drawn up, the aim was to achieve an assessment that fairly reflects how much home owners should be expected to contribute without making that assessment more complex than necessary. The proposals have been through a process of consultation and detailed comment. What we now have will ensure that public money for private housing will be spent where it is most needed.

Two types of assessment are prescribed. For owner-occupiers and disabled people, the test is based on personal income. All benefit payments are disregarded, so that anyone who is entirely dependent on benefits and anyone who receives income support, income-based jobseekers allowance or pension credit is assessed as having no income and is therefore not expected to make any contribution. Applicable income covers earnings, occupational and personal pensions, income from savings and investments and other items, such as rental income and maintenance payments.

Deductions are made for housing costs and there are allowances for children and for disability. Where an application is not eligible for a 100 per cent grant, the amount of grant reduces in 1 per cent steps according to the total applicable income.

For landlords or developers, the test assesses the cost of the works compared to the increase in value of the property attributable to those works. If the works effectively pay for themselves, no grant will be payable. If they do not, grant can be paid on the excess expense. The proportion of grant depends on other criteria, which reflect the contribution of the works to national priorities.

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** According to the report from the Subordinate Legislation Committee, the regulations contain

three points that the Executive accepts are wrong and will soon put right. I am new to this particular form of sport, but my understanding is that a draft is a draft and can be improved until it becomes a final document. Why cannot these drafts be improved and those things corrected now, so that there is no need to introduce another statutory instrument?

**Mrs Mulligan:** The reason for the delay is so that further discussion can take place on the issues in hand. It is our intention to introduce the new instrument as quickly as possible.

**Donald Gorrie:** It is not very satisfactory if the committee has gone through the instruments in great detail and is still concerned about several of the points. Can you give us any indication of how soon those things would be corrected?

**Mrs Mulligan:** I am taking further advice. Unfortunately, there is a procedural issue, as I am told that it is not possible to amend drafts. Instead, the whole instrument would have to fall, which would mean losing things that the committee recognises as being of benefit. We therefore have to go through the process and then amend the instruments at a later stage.

**Donald Gorrie:** The system is a bureaucratic fix, but I understand that: life is a bureaucratic fix.

One other issue seems to be in dispute between the Subordinate Legislation Committee and the Executive. The third point in the Subordinate Legislation Committee's report and in your answers concerns the words "and this regulation". Could you talk me through the Executive's position on that? Why do you think that the Subordinate Legislation Committee's criticism is wrong?

**Mrs Mulligan:** Does your question relate to report 3?

**Donald Gorrie:** It relates to question 3 in annex A of the papers for today's meeting, which sets out the Subordinate Legislation Committee's questions to you, your answers and that committee's report on your answers. My question relates to item 3 on page 7 of our paper; it is about the words "and this regulation".

**Mrs Mulligan:** The Executive felt that we could go further to make the regulations as clear as possible. As you can see, the regulations detail generic types of income, but we needed more detail on that, so we wanted to spend more time on it.

**Donald Gorrie:** Would any correction be included in the forthcoming SSI?

**Mrs Mulligan:** Yes, we can amend it.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** We have dealt with such issues in the past. When the Subordinate Legislation Committee

raises a point with the Executive and we see that point in the committee's report, it is normal for the Executive to take that point on board if it agrees with it. Could you clarify that that is what will happen with the issues that have been raised in the Subordinate Legislation Committee's report?

**Mrs Mulligan:** It is obviously helpful to have that further stage of input in passing the regulations. At all times, we would try to accede to the points that are being raised and we continue to do that.

**The Convener:** There are no further questions, so we will move to the formal procedure. I invite the minister to move motion S2M-188.

*Motion moved,*

That the Communities Committee, in consideration of the draft Housing Grants (Assessment of Contributions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003, recommends that the regulations be approved.—[Mrs Mary Mulligan.]

*Motion agreed to.*

### **Draft Housing Grants (Minimum Percentage Grant) (Scotland) Regulations 2003**

**The Convener:** We will now consider the draft Housing Grants (Minimum Percentage Grant) (Scotland) Regulations 2003. Members have received copies of the draft instrument and accompanying documentation. I ask the minister to speak briefly to the SSI.

**Mrs Mulligan:** The regulations specify the cases in which a set percentage of grant will be paid, irrespective of the test of resources. The cases specified are those that are agreed to be high priorities in improving the condition of Scotland's private housing. They include houses below the tolerable standard; houses that are subject to statutory action by the local authority; adaptations for disabled people; common repairs and local refurbishment schemes to encourage co-operation between neighbours; the replacement of lead plumbing; reducing exposure to radon gas; and providing a fire escape for a house in multiple occupation. All those cases will attract a minimum 50 per cent grant, except for the last of them, which attracts a minimum 20 per cent grant. If the assessment of contributions shows that the applicant is eligible for a higher rate of grant than the minimum, they will receive the higher amount.

**The Convener:** As there are no questions, I ask the minister to move motion S2M-187.

*Motion moved,*

That the Communities Committee, in consideration of the draft Housing Grants (Minimum Percentage Grants) (Scotland) Regulations 2003, recommends that the regulations be approved.—[Mrs Mary Mulligan.]

*Motion agreed to.*

### **Draft Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Amendment Order 2003**

**The Convener:** We will now consider the draft Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Amendment Order 2003. Members have received copies of the draft order and accompanying documentation. I ask the minister to speak briefly to the SSI.

**Mrs Mulligan:** The committee will be aware that, last year, the Scottish Executive conducted a wide-ranging review of the system of mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation. The conclusions of that review were announced on 19 March and the Executive responded to the Social Justice Committee's report on the same subject on 24 March.

We consider that those conclusions should be implemented and the order deals with those aspects of the review's conclusions that require an amendment to the current legislation. Other points are to be taken up by a working group, which will hold its first meeting shortly. The Executive will also keep under consideration the question whether primary legislation is needed to address wider issues.

The order exempts co-ownership bodies from licensing and removes from the scheme resident landlords with no more than two lodgers or tenants. It makes it an offence for any person to act as an agent for a landlord who does not have a licence or to refuse to disclose the name and address of the owner to the licensing authority. It makes a technical change to allow the Scottish Executive to provide additional funding to local authorities in respect of HMO licensing.

Members will note that the order makes no change to the size threshold for licensing, which will be reduced to the final level of three occupants on 1 October. The review found little enthusiasm for halting or suspending the threshold at four occupants. However, the measures that we are taking will help local authorities to deal with the additional pressures of including properties with three occupants. Removing small-scale resident landlords from the scheme takes out a quantity of properties that are unlikely to be problematic.

The new offences should make it easier for authorities to identify and tackle unlicensed landlords, who will no longer be able to hide behind an agent. The Scottish Executive intends to provide £1 million in each of the next three years to help authorities to complete the task of identifying and licensing all HMOs in their areas. Once we have full coverage, and with the revised guidance and self-certification scheme to be produced by the working group, it will be much easier for authorities to deal with the turnover of new properties and renewals.

**The Convener:** Are there any questions for the minister before I ask her to move motion S2M-186?

**Donald Gorrie:** The thrust of the SSI is welcome, in particular the two main points about disregarding the family in the calculations and getting the agents to take responsibility. However, the Subordinate Legislation Committee expressed concern about whether the SSI was legally sound in creating new offences. Among our papers there are several paragraphs on the issue, including an argument between the committee's lawyers and the Executive's lawyers that I would not begin to understand. Will the minister assure me that the Executive has studied the matter carefully and is confident that the wording of the SSI will stand up in court? Some of the people involved in HMOs are pretty sneaky; if they can find a hole in the legislation, they will.

10:15

**Mrs Mulligan:** As I said, we take comments from the Subordinate Legislation Committee very seriously. The point that Mr Gorrie raises has been considered in some detail. I assure him that the best legal advice available to us at the moment is that our proposals are sustainable should they be challenged.

*Motion moved,*

That the Communities Committee, in consideration of the draft Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Amendment Order 2003, recommends that the order be approved.—[*Mrs Mary Mulligan.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Convener:** I thank the deputy minister and her officials for attending.

### **Home Energy Efficiency Scheme Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2003 (SSI 2003/284)**

### **Improvement and Repairs Grant (Prescribed Valuation Band) (Scotland) Order 2003 (SSI 2003/314)**

**The Convener:** The committee will now consider two negative instruments, which could be subject to annulment under rule 10.4 of standing orders. However, no motion to annul either instrument has been lodged with the chamber desk. Committee members have been sent copies of the instruments and accompanying documentation. Do members wish to comment?

**Members:** No.

**The Convener:** Are members content with SSI 2003/284?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Are members content with SSI 2003/314?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Do members agree that we should report to the Parliament that we do not wish to make any recommendation on these SSIs?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Work Programme

10:18

**The Convener:** The next item on our agenda will lead to more substantial discussion. Members have received a paper on the committee's work programme. We hope to agree the programme and to publish it on the committee's web page. Whatever programme we devise will be subject to the vagaries of time and events. I invite comments on the programme. I will take general comments first but, if members wish to go through the programme paragraph by paragraph, I will be happy to do that.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I asked for clarification of this at our recent away day. My experience with the Mental Health (Scotland) Bill was that we did not give it enough time in committee, so I would like to know exactly how many bills this committee will be dealing with. I would like to give each bill an appropriate amount of time. The work programme mentions bills in six areas: antisocial behaviour, planning, housing, tenement law, charity law and domestic sprinklers. I think that there will also be some members' bills. Can you clarify whether the committee will deal with six Executive bills and potentially four or five members' bills? I would like that to be made clear before we discuss the programme further.

**The Convener:** We expect that if the proposed bills on those matters are introduced during the four-year session, they will come to the committee. I am not sure whether the Parliamentary Bureau has agreed to that, although I think that it has agreed that the antisocial behaviour bill will come to us.

**Mary Scanlon:** It would be helpful to be given an idea of what we are doing in the coming year.

**Jim Johnston (Clerk):** The only bill mentioned in the First Minister's speech setting out the legislative programme that is likely to come to the committee is the one on antisocial behaviour. It is up to the Parliamentary Bureau to decide which committee the bill will go to but, given that antisocial behaviour is within the committee's remit, it is highly likely that it will come to the committee for consideration in the autumn.

The other bills that are mentioned in the work programme are possible pieces of legislation that are identified within the partnership agreement. We have flagged them up now to let the committee know that it is likely that they will come to the committee at some point in the session. The work programme covers the four years of the session rather than the first year.



**Mary Scanlon:** I understand that the planning bill will come to the committee at the beginning of next year. Is that accurate?

**The Convener:** It is expected that there will be a planning bill, but the timetable has not been outlined. We expect that when it is introduced it will come to us. We will have to decide how to handle it in our detailed work programme.

In this paper on the work programme the clerks have tried to scope out the matters that we might be expected to deal with over the next four years. If the bills were all to come to the committee next week, it would be legitimate for us to report that we would find it difficult to consider them. We are trying to get a sense of the shape of our work over four years.

**Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (SNP):** Do we strongly expect that the antisocial behaviour bill will come to the committee? It should do, but I saw a comment in the press that the Justice 1 Committee or Justice 2 Committee might think that it is in its remit because it will change the law.

**The Convener:** The logic of that position is that one of the justice committees would have to take every bill and that no other committee would deal with any bill. As is reasonable, other committees may have an important role as a secondary committee. We will have to plan with other committees to decide which committee takes evidence and how that is reported to the lead committee to ensure that we—if we are the lead committee—have all the evidence.

**Campbell Martin:** Are we likely to be the lead committee?

**The Convener:** I think that it is highly likely, given that the Minister for Communities has responsibility for consultation on the matter and for the bill. Our remit broadly matches that of the Minister for Communities.

**Cathie Craigie:** I may be wrong, but I think that Parliament has given its approval to our being the lead committee on the antisocial behaviour bill. Did that not go through Parliament in the past couple of weeks?

**Jim Johnston:** I am not aware of it having done so.

**Cathie Craigie:** I am sure that we will be the lead committee.

The work programme indicates that over the next four years we will have to deal with many important pieces of legislation. We can look forward to four years during which we can involve ourselves in the day-to-day issues that affect communities throughout the country.

Without doubt the most important piece of legislation for the general public is the antisocial

behaviour bill. I want us to concentrate on that in order to do it justice. We should get out to communities to meet ordinary people who can give examples of their experiences.

**The Convener:** We will deal with that approach separately under item 4.

**Cathie Craigie:** Our work programme will surely be dominated by the antisocial behaviour bill over the next year. As we discussed at our away day, the bill and the inquiry into the social economy will be enough to take on in the coming period.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** I have a couple of questions on the work programme.

This point might relate to the paragraph of the work programme on homelessness or to the paragraph on affordable housing. Will we have an opportunity to consider the important issue of the supply and availability of social housing, particularly in the light of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003, which is very much to be welcomed?

As Cathie Craigie mentioned, it is recommended that the committee hold an inquiry into the social economy. Would that inquiry be for one year, or is it anticipated that it would take longer?

At some point over the next four years, I would like the committee to look at poverty in some depth, possibly as part of our deliberations on the antisocial behaviour bill. As we saw in the presentation from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, poverty is an important issue.

**The Convener:** First, on whether we should have an inquiry into affordable housing, we agreed in our earlier discussion that all the suggestions were useful, interesting and important. There is no suggestion, as may have been implied elsewhere, that the committee does not want to inquire into those matters. The previous committee did a lot of work on housing. In our discussion, we agreed that we need to ensure that our inquiries are substantial and that we should identify one issue as our first priority. However, that does not mean that everything that the committee does will be tied up for the next four years.

I do not envisage that our inquiry into the social economy will last four years. It has been suggested that we take initial evidence to get an idea about what the remit of the inquiry should be and what it should focus on, given that there are different bits that are equally important. From my perspective, the mutual and co-operative aspect is central. The inquiry will not take four years, but we will be judging the social economy to be our first priority and the one that we will start with.

We have a continuing interest in housing matters and in poverty issues because they are

part of our remit. We will have an opportunity to interrogate the Executive on them through the budget process and we will have a similar opportunity to reflect on them through our post-enactment scrutiny of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. Therefore, it is not as if housing is getting chucked on to the back burner. It will remain a live part of our work.

As Mary Scanlon pointed out at the away day, it is important that the committee has a substantial inquiry that involves people. If one member is abandoned to do everything on their own, that can put them under phenomenal pressure and perhaps not give us the right kind of material to work with. What we want to do is the way forward. However, the other issues are still important and we will always want to keep them in mind. We will regularly monitor them and reflect on whether what we are doing is what we aimed to do.

**Donald Gorrie:** Pursuing that subject, I support the suggestion that our main inquiry should be into developing the social economy.

On housing, perhaps the convener and the clerk can give me guidance as to whether it would be possible for the committee to ask for written evidence on housing finance from Shelter Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland and anyone else who is relevant. That could then inform our discussions on the budget. If we are to tell the Executive that it must put more investment into housing, it will be useful to have some information. That would be helpful but would not take up too much time.

**The Convener:** Those organisations can make written submissions at any time and in fact they are proactive in having a dialogue with the committee, which is why we have the list of suggestions for inquiries. We would encourage that.

Next week, we will be provided with a paper on how we will deal with the budget. One proposal that we will examine is that we should not only seek written evidence on the budget from such organisations but perhaps hear oral evidence. That would give them the opportunity to make the points that they want to make and us the opportunity to reflect on what they have to say.

**Donald Gorrie:** I want to raise one other small point on planning. There are two aspects to planning: the physical aspect, which is to do with the environment and so on, and the human aspect, which involves the role of councillors. In fact, I am going to see the deputy minister with responsibility for local government on an issue that has been raised with me, which is that councillors on planning committees are emasculated. I raise the issue because planning involves both the Local Government Committee and the

Communities Committee, and I do not know how we would deal with that. I am not suggesting that we should not look at planning, but we would need to take account of the way in which the issue involves the Local Government Committee.

**The Convener:** Do you mean when a planning bill is introduced?

**Donald Gorrie:** Yes.

**The Convener:** There will be opportunity for secondary committees to make their considerations. My experience from the Local Government Committee is that where people thought they had input, they could seek the opportunity to provide a report to the lead committee.

If there are no further comments, are members agreed that the work programme is a useful way forward?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** We also have to agree that the work programme be published on the committee's web page. People are waiting with bated breath at this very moment for it to be published. Are we agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** It might be worth saying that the clerks take the view that if we are to undertake all the work that has been outlined on the work programme, we will have to meet weekly.

## Antisocial Behaviour

10:30

**The Convener:** The committee is being asked to consider and agree the approach to possible pre-legislative scrutiny of the Executive's antisocial behaviour strategy, and to bid for funding for that approach from the Conveners Group.

I draw the committee's attention to the fact that within the paper there is an attempt to build on the useful way in which the previous committee worked during its inquiry into the voluntary sector. We tried to take soundings by speaking to people in groups and organisations throughout Scotland. The idea was to get views from a broad geographical spread. During that inquiry we were struck by the very particular, individual and localised experiences as well as the strong general themes that came out of communities. We thought that that type of approach, as well as using groups of reporters, would be useful.

**Donald Gorrie:** The paper mentions that the clerks know some of the things that the Executive has been doing in its consultation. Would it be possible to have a fuller description of what the Executive consultation has done so that we do not duplicate that work?

**The Convener:** It would be useful for us to get that information from the Executive officials. I am sure they will be happy to tell us because I understand that the work that has been done is quite substantial.

**Donald Gorrie:** It is a big subject that covers the more immediate side of people misbehaving and what to do about it now, as well as the longer-term aim of reducing such behaviour in future. The latter might involve sport, the arts, education and all sorts of community organisations. Do we have any idea about how to approach them? I hope that we will cast the net as widely as possible.

**The Convener:** There are obvious national key stakeholders that will be doing that kind of work and will be able to offer comment. We will also be trying to do that work at a local level. I am always struck by the people in local communities who are compassionate as well as concerned and who are involved in working with the community. It would be quite interesting to hear about the barriers and hindrances to the effectiveness of that work.

I would be interested to hear comments from members about where the vehicle is for the committee to get close to those groups. The voluntary sector and local government will probably provide the first places for the clerks to contact to seek out useful groups. However,

although it is important, I do not think that the intention is to meet only with concerned people who are having a bad time with antisocial behaviour. It is also about meeting the police and other agencies, such as local voluntary groups that are trying the kind of ideas that Donald Gorrie outlined.

**Elaine Smith:** If we agree the paper today, will the clerks then approach the groups and people whom we want to approach or will a list come back to the committee for agreement? If the committee is not to agree that, I would like to make a couple of points.

**The Convener:** We have to let the clerks get on and organise matters. If you have particular individuals, groups or organisations that you would like to be approached, that might be an easier way to get started. I am entirely comfortable with a come-all-ye approach. There are no groups that we do not want to talk to, but we might have positive ideas about groups that it would be worth speaking to. You can see the range of organisations outlined in the paper. However, that list might not necessarily tap into all the folk who have something to say and it would be unrealistic to expect that. We are trying to get a flavour from throughout Scotland of the issues that people are wrestling with locally.

**Elaine Smith:** That clarifies matters and I agree that the clerks have a job to do.

I have a couple of comments on the paper. Paragraph 14, which you referred to a moment ago, talks about

"groups representing the views of ... Young people".

We should obviously hear from young people as well, not just groups representing their views.

**The Convener:** The paper just says, "Young people".

**Elaine Smith:** No, it talks about

"groups representing the views of .. Young people."

**The Convener:** I cannot imagine any set of circumstances in which we would want to listen to older people saying what they think young people's views are. The strong intention is to speak to young people's organisations and groups. There certainly would not be any point in hearing from others speaking on their behalf.

**Elaine Smith:** I am glad that you clarified that. Would poverty groups such as the Child Poverty Action Group be included to help us to tease out some of the root causes of antisocial behaviour in relation to poverty and equality? There tend to be more problems with antisocial behaviour in deprived communities than there are in more affluent communities. It is important to tease out some of the issues to do with that.

**The Convener:** If members think of particular groups that it would be useful for us to speak to, either in communities or as part of our evidence taking, it would be helpful if they would let the clerks know. We have to acknowledge that there are logistical considerations to do with how we manage our time. There is no inhibition to anyone submitting written evidence on these issues. There is a genuine attempt to speak to communities in all their shapes, forms and diversities. In the part of the paper that identifies the areas to visit, the obvious difficulty is that Dundee City Council is not in Mid Scotland and Fife, but if there is general agreement on the areas that the committee has flagged up, that will allow the clerks to proceed.

**Cathie Craigie:** The suggestions that the clerks have made are acceptable. The experience that I have had so far through the consultation process is that ordinary people who are victims of antisocial behaviour and just want civic pride to be brought back to their communities are willing to participate. In the past couple of months, I have consulted people in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and have found that people representing themselves or tenants organisations, the police and housing departments are more than willing to work together as a group to find solutions. I have been thinking about how the committee could reach those ordinary people. The paper suggests a way to do that, but I wonder whether Jim Johnston has any thoughts on how we can engage collectively with ordinary people—the voice of Scotland.

**Jim Johnston:** Our Scottish Parliament information centre researchers are considering a number of ways of doing that for the groups we visit. The suggestion is to split members into reporter groups. If members agree the approach, the clerks could liaise with each reporter group to identify groups in each area that members would be interested in meeting. We can certainly provide an initial suggestion with regard to those groups once the committee has identified specific areas, as Johann Lamont pointed out.

**Cathie Craigie:** The formal consultation period ends tomorrow. Do we have any idea how long it will take the Executive to draw together responses and when we can expect to see something in black and white?

**Jim Johnston:** I understand that the Executive has commissioned an analysis of the responses from the University of Glasgow. I am not entirely clear about the timetable for that but, given the proposed timetable for the introduction of the bill, I expect it to come out some time in October.

**The Convener:** Do we agree that we will use the model identified in annex B of reporter groups covering various areas and that the clerks will liaise with individual groups on specific visits?

**Members indicated agreement.**

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

**Mary Scanlon:** I have a query about the questions that will be put on the website. There is a lot of emphasis on analysing antisocial behaviour and considering the causes and what is being done to address the problem. I understand that if there is best practice, we should all learn from it. I would like there to be a question asking people what they think should be done about antisocial behaviour, rather than simply asking what is antisocial behaviour, what is the scale of the problem, what are the causes and what is being done now.

**The Convener:** That makes sense. We can add that question. Do we agree to what the paper suggests?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Debt Arrangement Scheme

10:39

**The Convener:** We come to item 5. Members are asked to consider and agree an approach to the Executive's consultation and draft regulations to introduce the debt arrangement scheme following the passage of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Act 2002. The previous Social Justice Committee was involved with the act and it is important that we try to do something in relation to the regulations. Are there any comments on the paper before us?

**Donald Gorrie:** It is a good idea for us to take evidence from the organisations that are listed in the paper, which understand the problems at the sharp end. I do not know whether other members received representations, but one of the fuel-related organisations approached me about fuel debts, which could be involved. That might come up in oral evidence, but what the organisation said seemed sensible.

**The Convener:** Yes. Energywatch will give us a briefing. There will be a question over how we handle that and whether we want to speak to the power companies as well. We are a bit restricted by time, but if we can agree what the paper suggests as an initial outline, it will not preclude us from considering later the issue that Donald Gorrie raised. Do we agree to the approach outlined in the paper?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We have come to the end of our business. I thank members for their attendance.

*Meeting closed at 10:41.*



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