

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 11 November 2003
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

8th Meeting 2003, Session 2

CONVENER

*Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

*Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

*David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)

*Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP)

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP)

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Matt Costello (North Lanarkshire Council)

Councillor Garry Coutts (Highland Council)

Matt Forde (Glasgow City Council)

David Goldie (Highland Council)

Cath King (Highland Council)

Sandy Ritchie (Moray Council)

Jim Valentine (Perth and Kinross Council)

Phil Walker (Glasgow City Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

ASSISTANT CLERK

Euan Donald

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Local Government and Transport Committee

Tuesday 11 November 2003

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:08*]

Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey

The Convener (Bristow Muldoon): I welcome members, the public and the press to the eighth meeting of the Local Government and Transport Committee. We have apologies from Rosie Kane and Iain Smith has sent apologies for the fact that he will miss the start of the meeting. I also welcome Tommy Sheridan, who is here to substitute for Rosie Kane. He is not an official committee substitute, but he is entitled to participate in any committee meeting.

I welcome to the committee Jim Valentine, who is head of roads service at Perth and Kinross Council, and Sandy Ritchie, who is head of direct services at Moray Council. They are here to talk about the Scottish road maintenance condition survey, which the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland completed earlier this year and which raised a number of issues on the maintenance of roads. I invite the witnesses to make some introductory remarks on the survey, after which I will open up the discussion to questions from members.

Jim Valentine (Perth and Kinross Council): I will briefly mention the clerk's paper. To be correct, the survey is not complete; it is on-going. It is only a carriageway survey, but it is indicative of underfunding in other areas—similar work is being done nationally on footways, lighting and bridges.

We hoped that the survey would provide local and national members of SCOTS with robust information that they could use to inform their decision making. The survey goes back some years, to about 1994, when it was proven in Scotland that the subjective visual survey methods that were still used in England and Wales were unreliable. The lack of good qualitative information had led to a lot of media discussion, much of which was based on anecdotal observations. The need for a new kind of survey was reflected by the initiative's swift take-up by all Scottish councils.

The survey uses laser technology, which has been used internationally for many years,

including on the Scottish trunk road network, but has now been specifically developed for local authority roads. I am pleased to say that the Department for Transport has now picked up the Scottish system and will introduce it on its principal roads from 2004 and roll it out over the rest of its network by, we hope, 2008. We continue to work with the department to develop the system.

Audit Scotland has worked with SCOTS to arrive at a suitable performance indicator for carriageway condition. However, I stress that the indicator is only a network-level indicator of needs. Local knowledge still needs to be applied to the results and other factors—such as road safety, economic development and the general prioritisation of funding—need to be included in the equation. One of our next steps is to have a roads summit to provide a common methodology for calculating a backlog figure that will be used throughout the United Kingdom.

Many of the figures that have appeared in the press recently have been based on anecdotal evidence or surveys that are not statistically representative. The big benefit of the survey is that it will allow trends in condition to be monitored with scientifically based evidence. It has provided the information that the former Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning and the Transport and the Environment Committee requested in 2002 to substantiate the original backlog figure that SCOTS produced.

We have the preliminary result for the principal roads from 2002 and a sample from 2003. The 2003 survey continues. It must be borne in mind that we are at the cutting edge of technology and did not have a benchmark for how long the survey would take, although we hope that it will be completed early next year.

The information that we have to date indicates that approximately 40 per cent of the local authority A-road network needs to be investigated for maintenance treatment and that around 50 per cent of the B, C and unclassified road networks also need to be investigated. That is a good-news story in light of our initial press release last year, which indicated that around 70 per cent of the B, C and unclassified road networks needed to be investigated. Because we have a much bigger sample this year, it now looks as though the figure will come in at around 50 per cent.

Because of budgetary constraints, councils have found it necessary over the past few years to concentrate on immediate concerns and the long-term investment programme on the local road network has effectively disappeared. We hope that the survey will quantify the roads problem that is apparent in MSPs' and local councillors' mailbags.

The Convener: As I understand it, 2002-03 is effectively a trial year for the survey, which will be a continuing process from now on. How successful do the councils and SCOTS regard the survey as being? Do improvements need to be made in future? Moreover, has the survey been funded solely from local authority budgets or has the Scottish Executive made any contribution to date? Are negotiations taking place on that issue?

14:15

Jim Valentine: I will answer the second part first. The survey has been funded purely by the local authorities, apart from a contribution from the Department for Transport towards development costs and the research that was required. That research is continuing and the funding from the Department for Transport is continuing.

I should explain that a national roads board does all roads research on behalf of the four nations and tries to co-ordinate that research. We have attracted funding from the board, but each council contributes towards a four-year programme for the survey.

Councils are finding the information useful and are using it to prioritise some of their programmes. However, it is early days and the technology is new. There is no benchmark to work to and it has taken a while to get the system up and running.

The Convener: How significant has the Department for Transport's financial contribution been?

Jim Valentine: It was significant in that it got research with the Transport Research Laboratory up and running. We are working in partnership with all bodies and that funding stream is continuing. What started off as a Scottish initiative has become a UK initiative because there are common problems.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): You might know that Stirling Council has been surveying its roads. It has set up a panel to scrutinise how resources are allocated and to make long-term plans of four years and 20 years. Can you use the results that you have come up with to comment on the time scales? I am thinking about next year and where that will take us. Perhaps more important, I am wondering whether the Scottish Executive will follow what has been happening down south and commit to a long-term strategy. Do you think that we have enough information from the SCOTS surveys to be starting on a long-term strategy? From the information that we have received so far, I am aware that a stitch in time will save money in the long-term.

Jim Valentine: It would be great if we could have a 10-year plan and I believe that the SCOTS

survey would recommend that we strive for that. However, we do not have sufficient information at present; only 14 of the 32 councils have finalised results and we do not have any of this year's A-road surveys yet. However, by February, we will have all the results in. We told the Audit Scotland value-for-money study group that we would strive to get the information to it by then. Although I said that the percentage of unclassified roads that have to be investigated has dropped from 70 per cent to 50 per cent, we will have to wait to ensure that our information is robust and repeatable.

Dr Jackson: So you are saying that by February 2004 you will be able to propose some sort of long-term plan to which we could encourage the Scottish Executive to make a commitment.

Jim Valentine: Through working with the UK roads board, we hope that, by that time, we will have a methodology for calculating a backlog figure and for finding a way ahead.

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Audit Scotland has announced its value-for-money study into the maintenance of Scotland's road network. How will the work done by SCOTS relate to the Audit Scotland study?

Jim Valentine: We have worked closely with Audit Scotland for the past three years. As soon as Audit Scotland said that it was going to ask for a performance indicator for roads maintenance, we said that, based on our experience, we believed that the one that it intended to use was not the most appropriate. We then worked with Audit Scotland to arrive at an appropriate indicator. We continue to work closely with Audit Scotland. The value-for-money study does not mention any backlog figures because it was decided that that matter could wait until the work had been concluded.

Mr Welsh: So your work is complementary. Do you have a different focus from Audit Scotland's and, if so, how do the two approaches link up?

Jim Valentine: I do not think that we have a different focus. We have told Audit Scotland that as technical officers we are striving to get the best that we can out of the roads network. Audit Scotland is obviously doing what it can with the information that we have provided.

Mr Welsh: Do you have any indication yet of how road maintenance standards vary across the country?

Jim Valentine: We have an indication, but not the full survey. The information will be published once the survey is complete.

Mr Welsh: Have you noticed any geographical trends—whether rural, urban or mixed—or identified any early signs in that respect?

Jim Valentine: Our original survey debunked a few myths about A-class roads. For example, it showed that there was not a great deal of variation between urban and rural roads; although the problems were different, the overall condition rating was similar. As for the old all-purpose trunk road network versus local road network argument, the results of the original survey showed that the conditions of the two types of road were very similar.

Mr Welsh: Does the maintenance of roads vary across the country?

Jim Valentine: The survey examines only the condition of the roads.

Mr Welsh: Are some local authorities performing better than others on road maintenance? Is there any discernible pattern in that respect?

Jim Valentine: Any such pattern is related to the condition of the road. One would need to examine the trend and spend by individual councils before that issue could be fully analysed.

The Convener: Do you intend to do that?

Jim Valentine: That is the next step, but it will take a considerable amount of research.

The Convener: I am aware that some local authorities are increasing their spend on roads maintenance partly because of the move to the prudential borrowing regime. Do you intend to analyse the importance that local authorities across Scotland give to roads maintenance and capital expenditure?

Jim Valentine: SCOTS would simply supply the results of the survey to the decision makers. How they interpret those results is up to them. We intend to develop the survey further to allow people to arrive at budgetary figures and make other decisions. However, although we could recommend an asset management plan, it would be up to local decision makers to decide whether that plan should be implemented.

The Convener: It would be useful to find out the priority that individual local authorities are giving to roads, perhaps in terms of the spend per kilometre or mile of road. Such a measure would certainly tell us whether a particular local authority was making roads a priority.

Jim Valentine: Although the spend per kilometre of road has been dropped as a statutory performance indicator, SCOTS has retained it as a voluntary performance indicator in order to inform the process.

Dr Jackson: I assume that you have taken into account the fact that the Scottish Executive's quality-of-life moneys have allowed councils to spend a little more on roads. As far as relating the

matter to grant-aided expenditure is concerned, we should remember that that additional money has been allocated over the past two years. If you are seriously considering the convener's proposal, you will have to be careful about making clear the amount of money that has been made available.

My second point follows on from Andrew Welsh's question about Audit Scotland. I am concerned about the extent to which the work will move us on. You have said that any survey has to be evidence based, that it must be carried out using laser technology and that we must ensure that the right techniques are available. What extra information will we receive from Audit Scotland and the questionnaire that it is giving to local authorities? I hope that we will be able to use that information to start to get the non-trunk roads looked at.

Jim Valentine: From Audit Scotland, you will get all the stuff that I cannot give you, such as asset management plans for each council and information on budgets that councils have spent. It can supply much more information. All that we can give you is information on road conditions.

Much quality-of-life money and additional moneys that have been given to councils over recent years have been targeted at specific objectives. However, in respect of cycling, walking and safer streets, for example, cycle lanes or coloured surfacings that are put on to a street that is deteriorating will add to the maintenance burden—some £15 per square metre might be added to the costs of repairing a street. Therefore, dilemmas occur where money is specifically targeted.

Dr Jackson: I take on board what you are saying about the information that could be used from the local authorities and Audit Scotland. However, the fact is that we need around £1 billion to start to rectify matters. If such a huge gap exists, how useful in the scheme of things is the little bit of extra information that will come from the local authorities via Audit Scotland?

Sandy Ritchie (Moray Council): In the past, we have always worked on subjective information, but we aim to make figures such as the £1.5 billion that has been quoted objective information rather than subjective information. It might be that £1.5 billion is an unrealistic figure—the figure might be more or less than that—but currently we do not know. We want reasoned information to allow us to identify needs and how much things will cost. Such information will inform the investment programme that will be necessary to write off the backlog. We should work through an objective, repeatable and reliable process.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): On a technical aspect of the survey, it appears from

what I have read that the survey is a surface assessment. Can you judge the structural strength of the highways from it?

Jim Valentine: The survey considers defects in a length of road and aggregates that information to arrive at a score. It therefore gives an indication of the road's structural strength. Currently, specific defects are being considered. Consideration is being given to the longitudinal profile of a road, which relates to the road's bumpiness; rutting, which relates to depression by wheels; and surface texture. This year, we are measuring cracking and developing measurement of edge deterioration, which is important for rural authorities. Once those five parameters have been considered, we will have considered all the aspects of the road's structural condition.

Iain Smith: We hear much about backlogs. From your existing knowledge or from the results of the survey, can you say what level of expenditure local authorities in Scotland should be making in order to break even and to ensure that backlogs do not worsen? Obviously, that is important for judging the level of funding that should be made available.

Jim Valentine: We cannot give an exact figure at the moment. As I said, research into arriving at a backlog figure is on-going. In the past, there have been problems as a result of various people attempting to arrive at such a figure. We are now aiming to have a UK standard for calculating backlog, which would inform each council of what its backlog is.

Iain Smith: So you cannot tell us whether, for example, the fact that a local authority is spending approximately £300 million this year on maintenance of the road network is enough to prevent further deterioration.

Jim Valentine: Not at this moment in time.

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): You said that yours was an initiative to pull together information that was not in the public domain or that was not collated in any way. The idea behind it was, as you said, to get that information to the decision makers. That was what you envisaged. How have the decision makers in the local authorities responded to the provision of that information?

14:30

Sandy Ritchie: As roads professionals within local authorities, we present information to councils on a yearly basis. To do so, we have various tools available to us. We can look at the historic spends, the information from accidents and the information from the routine visual inspections and safety inspections that we carry

out. The survey is another tool to add to those, which identifies in more detail the physical structure of the road itself. With that information, we can prioritise areas and put forward indicative spending needs to our councils in relation to the maintenance of the asset.

You can talk about papering over the cracks or painting the windows when, in fact, the wood is rotten—that idea has been raised before. The issue is whether we can go beyond that and say that, if remedial work is carried out at the appropriate time, the road's longevity will be increased and, therefore, the long-term spending will be less. We want to know the level of investment. As I said, the survey gives us information not only on individual authorities, but on all the local authorities. Therefore, comparators throughout Scotland can be looked at and investment can be proportioned accordingly.

Dr Jackson: You are obviously trying to dovetail your survey with the UK picture. Do you see any reason why, in doing that, you may delay the time scale for coming to a decision on how bad the roads are and what investment is needed?

Jim Valentine: No, that will not delay the SCOTS initiative, which will proceed regardless. The Department for Transport is now trying to dovetail with that progress, but that will not delay the SCOTS initiative, as it is separate. It makes sense to undertake things such as machine development on a UK level in order to make savings, principally because there are not many survey machines and each one needs to be verified and calibrated every year. It makes sense to spread the economic burden of that across the UK, rather than to leave it in Scotland. However, what the rest of the UK is doing will not hold up Scotland at all; we are leading the way in the technology.

Mr Welsh: Will the results of your research be robust enough to allow prioritisation of work programmes and investment by local authorities? What will the end product be?

Jim Valentine: The end product will be the performance indicator that is given to Audit Scotland and the maps showing where the areas of concern are. We hope that local councils will use that information to target their resources, but work is still required at a lower level to investigate how those priorities fit in with other issues such as road safety and economic development, as Sandy Ritchie said.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I would like clarification on a couple of points. The first relates to the issues that you said you are also surveying. Where does drainage fit in? Is it part of the survey? In rural Scotland, in particular, the lack of roadside drainage and the impact of flooding

are a big issue. Is that factored into the survey or is it something that you would consider as part of a separate survey?

Jim Valentine: Drainage is not picked up in the survey except where a lack of it is causing a problem that is apparent on the surface of the road. The survey is of carriageway condition. However, drainage is another aspect that will be looked at.

David Mundell: My second point concerns the extent to which you factor in usage and anticipated usage. I am thinking of timber traffic, in particular. A truck carrying timber is the equivalent of almost several hundred ordinary vehicles in some instances. If you know that 100 timber trucks will pass along the road, you can anticipate that within six months the road will be in a different condition. How much is anticipated deterioration factored in?

Jim Valentine: To date we have left that analysis with local authorities. We have supplied them only with survey results at a network level, with no information added other than an urban-rural split and a split by classification of roads. It is up to each council how it wants to use that information.

Sandy Ritchie: I come from a local authority area in which there is a lot of timber traffic. As we said, the survey will cover edge deterioration as well—a lot of timber traffic goes down narrow roads. That will inform the debate. It is down to local authorities, working with the forestry industry, to try to prioritise routes and timing, and, if possible, to do remedial strengthening and widening works to minimise impacts. That will still be part of the picture that needs to come back to local authorities so that they can decide whether a route that looks as though it is failing and is expecting timber traffic should have a higher priority within the programme that the councils consider and fund each year.

David Mundell: Are there examples of local authority best practice in addressing poor road conditions from which we could learn?

Sandy Ritchie: We want to see examples of best practice over time. The survey is incomplete at the moment and it is too early to demonstrate the best practice areas. Information from the survey and local knowledge can together assist the programme of investment in a particular road over time so that complete deterioration, which has happened in parts of the Highlands, will not happen again.

David Mundell: Is the issue just one of funding or could we adopt best practice that would reduce the funding requirement?

Sandy Ritchie: As roads professionals, we always think that there is insufficient funding. We

need as much information as possible so that we can prioritise work and anticipate where there will be failure. That will come from the condition surveys and the safety surveys that we carry out, which pick up drainage issues. We will take all that information on board to get a composite knowledge of where to target funds to deliver the most benefit.

Dr Jackson: I have two quick questions. Would the Audit Scotland work pick up what David Mundell was saying about timber traffic? I acknowledge that there is a specific need in that regard. If you were going to allocate funds on the basis of need, you might not take into account additional needs such as those around timber traffic. From the work that you have done, can you say something about issues relating to service tracks? Were those issues covered?

Jim Valentine: The issues to do with service tracks were not included, but they will arise as the survey progresses. If a road is failing because of issues around service tracks, that will be apparent in a short time scale, as it will show up in the condition survey. The Audit Scotland work asks about varieties of traffic as well as service tracks, so information will come out of that.

Dr Jackson: Will it be possible to highlight whether there is a significant on-going problem with service tracks and damage to roads?

Jim Valentine: We are using DVDs as the survey progresses. We could examine a problem in a given area and see whether it was tied to service tracks. However, that would not show up differently from any other form of deterioration without our examining 56,000km of road.

The Convener: Are there any further questions?

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I have a quick question, not so much on maintenance but on the overall funding mechanism. What is your opinion of the funding mechanism that is used to calculate support for local authorities? Is it fair? Does it need to be changed? If so, how?

Sandy Ritchie: That is a good question. As far as we have identified, the backlog shows that there is a level of need. I know from the council mailbags—I am sure that this applies to the Parliament's mailbag, too—that road maintenance, potholes, drainage and flooding problems are frequent topics. As professionals, we struggle to command sufficient local authority funds to deliver on the anticipated level of need, so in our subjective way we prioritise where the funds go. However, the issue is for our political masters and, although we can make the case for roads funding, a wide range of other local priorities have been identified.

The Convener: That brings us to the end of questions from members. I thank Sandy Ritchie and Jim Valentine for their evidence. The information from the SCOTS survey will be a valuable asset to the committee and the Parliament in examining whether local authorities are adequately funded, particularly in relation to road maintenance. I commend you for the work that is being undertaken. We look forward to seeing the further evidence that will come out of the survey, which I am sure will inform the debate in Parliament.

Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

14:41

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill. The first group of witnesses is from Glasgow City Council. I welcome Matt Forde, principal officer for youth justice, and Phil Walker, the head of community services. I welcome the fact that you have come here today to give evidence as part of our consideration of the bill.

Given that this is our first session on the bill, I will say a few words of introduction. This committee is a secondary committee in consideration of the bill—the Communities Committee is the lead committee. However, we have decided to take evidence on the bill and we want to focus especially on the role of local authorities in dealing with antisocial behaviour, and on the resource implications for local authorities of the existing ways of dealing with antisocial behaviour and of the measures in the bill.

I ask members to focus as much as possible on the role of local authorities—we will hear only from local authorities today. I invite the representatives of Glasgow City Council to say a few words of introduction about their current systems for dealing with antisocial behaviour and, more important, to give their views on the bill.

Phil Walker (Glasgow City Council): Recently, there was the housing stock transfer and in the past the most common approach to tackling antisocial behaviour was through housing services. The bill links antisocial behaviour to activities within communities, so a corporate and strategic approach is required for that, which requires a range of services from across the council and registered social landlords, and close work with the police. Glasgow City Council recognises that and is putting in place a framework such that when the bill is passed we will be in a position to work with a range of partners to tackle antisocial behaviour corporately and at strategic level, while making an impact at local level.

Matt Forde (Glasgow City Council): The council takes a partnership approach on the issue of young people's antisocial behaviour and on youth justice, which is a linked issue. The council has already established a range of innovative services, which we believe are effective, to address young people's offending and high-risk behaviour. These services and initiatives have been agreed through the partnership approach, which brings together the council, the health

service, the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, the children's panel, the procurator fiscal, Strathclyde police and voluntary and community organisations. Glasgow's youth justice forum has put in place a strategy to tackle the issues, which is based on a determination to tackle offending and antisocial behaviour among young people in ways that are most appropriate to young people.

We want to communicate better to the public some of the realities that are associated with the issue. Only a small minority of young people are involved in persistent or serious offending; most young people, like most adults, are not involved in such behaviour. The youth justice side more often than not involves vulnerable children, who later become involved in offending behaviour. One aim of our partnership approach is to prevent young people from getting involved in difficult behaviour by introducing initiatives in schools and pre-school services that support families and enable them to bring up their children better. Those initiatives are at the heart of our strategic approach. We believe that we can prevent young people from ending up in difficulty by taking action earlier in the process.

We have put in place a range of good services, such as our restorative justice scheme, which started in August this year. Those services may well provide solutions to the existing frustrations about lack of provision. I stress that a range of activities are taking place that are yet to bed in or bite. We are working to fill the gaps.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): My question is for both Matt Forde and Phil Walker. The Scottish Executive has said that the width of the consultation process was unprecedented, but many organisations, including community organisations, have advised us that they were not informed of the process and therefore did not have the opportunity to be part of the exercise. Is that the case? More important, did the Executive listen to the points that Glasgow City Council raised in the consultation and were they reflected in the bill as published?

Phil Walker: Anyone who is familiar with Glasgow will acknowledge its size and the huge number of organisations in the city. We looked at the salient organisations—the social inclusion partnerships, Glasgow Housing Association, the police, the health board, community councils and the council's area committees. This Saturday, the community councils' annual conference is on tackling antisocial behaviour in Glasgow. Tomorrow's seminar for communities, in the city chambers, will focus on community safety and antisocial behaviour.

My staff and I wrote to and visited a range of organisations and tried our best to involve as many people as possible. Many community groups

responded directly to the Scottish Executive rather than through the council. The council's response was formulated across council services, in consultation with our partners and in response to any views that we received. Some social inclusion partnerships chose to submit their responses through the council, but a sizeable number of community groups responded directly to ministers.

Paul Martin: If I had a problem with an antisocial neighbour, which part of Glasgow City Council would I talk to? If I have no knowledge of the services that the council provides, what telephone number would I phone for advice and what kind of support could I expect to receive if I were a tenant or—importantly, because this does not apply only to tenants—a resident?

Phil Walker: That is a fair point. Until eight months ago, you would have contacted a number in housing services. Because of the housing stock transfer, the council is having to examine strategically how it takes on board issues of that nature. Some 45 per cent of Glasgow's houses are privately owned and 7 per cent are privately rented. That means that the majority of houses do not fall within the registered social landlord sector.

In due course, a community reassurance section of the council will have to be set up. Its number will be advertised and it will provide a response to people who feel that they are experiencing antisocial behaviour. That unit will be multidisciplinary and we envisage its having police support. It will take a hand-in-glove approach with Glasgow Housing Association's neighbourhood relations unit, which tackles the issues that you have outlined and which has paralegals, investigation officers and administration support to provide back-up if tenants and the GHA feel that they need to resort to the use of antisocial behaviour orders.

We have examined models in the south of England in places where local authorities have transferred ownership of the housing stock. It is becoming clear that, because local authorities have a leading role in situations relating to antisocial behaviour orders and in tackling antisocial behaviour in communities, they have to establish some sort of capacity for co-ordination of activity relating to antisocial behaviour. With the best will in the world, there is no single-service solution to the problem. It necessitates a multi-agency approach and local authorities are well placed to play a co-ordinating role. Glasgow City Council recognises that much of its capacity in that regard went to the GHA and that that capacity needs to be replaced.

Mr Welsh: I want to ask about the partnership approach in practice. You mentioned a range of organisations, each with its own organisational structures and reporting systems. How, in a

partnership approach, can you avoid endless meetings and ensure that action is taken?

Phil Walker: I can give you a good example of the partnership approach in practice. In the past couple of years in Glasgow, there have been lots of public meetings relating to issues around low-level youth crime and antisocial behaviour. The process is never easy, because there are lots of agendas, funding issues and visions, but we have developed a single unified vision and a new service for restorative justice, which is the youth justice forum that Matt Forde mentioned earlier. It is early days yet, but the indications are that, now, if a person who is under 16 commits an offence—even a first offence—something will happen within a month, rather than within 10 months or a year. That is extremely early intervention.

That restorative justice service involves five different agencies, all of which are funded in different ways by different sources. I am not saying that that is the easiest way in the world to go about addressing the issues, but there are no easy ways. My staff, the police, staff from other bits of the council, the fire brigade and the health board are all involved. The most important thing is that we are engaging with young people at an early stage in the onset of offending behaviour.

As I said, it is early days yet, but we have a full-time researcher on the staff and we are finding that kids who, in the past, would normally be throwing stones at First Glasgow buses are now—through the process of restorative justice—spending their holidays working with First Glasgow. I accept that the process can be difficult, but the added value of bringing other people to the table and trying not to provide a single-service solution is immeasurable.

Matt Forde: That is a very good example. Trying to work in partnership is complex, but it brings tremendous pluses. The example that Phil Walker has given came about through discussion in the youth justice strategy group that I mentioned, which sits alongside and within children's services planning in Glasgow, which has a similar partnership approach. Some of the other issues that have been developed in that group, which are related to antisocial behaviour, are powerful examples of why we should work in partnership. I will mention two of them.

The first is working to support families with very young children through the sure start Scotland programme. International evidence shows that, if one wants to prevent criminal behaviour in children, one of the best things that one can do is support vulnerable parents from pregnancy right through the first two or three years of their children's lives. We have invested in development of such services.

The second is the new community schools approach in Glasgow, whereby we have put in different chunks of money to bring in from the health service and social work a variety of staff to work in schools to target young people before the difficulties get too serious. Both of those initiatives have been developed as a result of partnership working and of people talking to each other in committees and passing papers back and forth. Partnership working means managing complex processes, which is not easy, but it results in a better way of doing things.

Mr Welsh: I am interested in the mechanism that you have chosen to harness the meetings and to produce the desired action.

Paul Martin: I want to return to the point that Phil Walker made about the partnership approach and I will give an example of how we sometimes contradict ourselves. Although Glasgow Housing Association has a section that deals with antisocial behaviour, we are talking about forming another section that would deal with antisocial behaviour. We say that it would be very nice if we could all work together, but I have just given an example of a situation in which people would not be working together, because there would be two separate organisations. I am sure that both of them would mean well and that both would want to solve the problem.

One of the issues that we face is resources. You were right to point out that one could spend one's whole career dealing with all the issues that are on the go. Is there a case for pooling all the resources in a one-stop shop that would deal with the problem of antisocial behaviour?

Phil Walker: If the GHA were here today, I am sure that it would say that, in many respects, its business is its business. The bill is quite clear about the fact that the local authority has lead responsibility for co-ordinating and recording antisocial behaviour orders and for bringing to bear the full weight of its services to tackle antisocial behaviour.

Glasgow is unique in Scotland, but not in the UK. I have seconded police officers, who today and for the past week have been examining other local authorities that find themselves in the same position as Glasgow City Council.

As we work through the bill's proposals, there will be the potential for duplication of effort. It might be that the local authority takes the co-ordinating and recording role, but the tactical role of implementation, which involves investigation and so on, is carried out by GHA staff. It is not an either/or situation. We are trying to evolve a model that integrates the operations of both organisations.

Paul Martin: You mentioned community planning. Although there will be statutory powers to ensure that certain agencies—the chief constable and the local authority—are forced to adhere to the community planning exercise, there is no statutory provision to ensure registered social landlords' involvement in that process. Do you see that as being a difficulty? We all talk about joined-up approaches to such issues, but unless agencies are forced to do that on a statutory basis, will they take any notice or will they simply be passengers in the process?

Phil Walker: I think that the very fact that registered social landlords operate at the coalface creates the necessity for the big strategic organisations to work closely with them. There are 70-odd registered social landlords in Glasgow. One of them, the GHA, has 33 per cent, or over 80,000, of the houses. The council is very serious about tackling the issue which has, as the committee is well aware, been bubbling up across the city for the past couple of years. It would be impossible to address it without the involvement of the registered social landlords.

The council is working with some of the registered social landlords on implementing acceptable behaviour contracts. We are working with the police, four or five registered social landlords and Streetwatch Glasgow Ltd, using closed-circuit television images, to pull together the evidence that is needed for a package of measures to be put in place to address the antisocial behaviour that is taking place not in the locus of the house, but in other parts of the community.

15:00

David Mundell: You spoke about the changes that have come about as a result of stock transfer. Given the way that the bill is framed, are local authorities in the best position to take forward the measures or would others be best placed to take the lead?

Phil Walker: If the definition of antisocial behaviour pertains to the behaviour of an individual or individuals in the community, the local authority is without doubt best placed to take the lead. If we want to reduce antisocial behaviour, we have to look at education, culture and leisure services and environmental protection services—indeed, the whole range of services that only a local authority can bring to bear on the problem.

If antisocial behaviour is looked at within the narrow parameters of the housing environment, it would be possible to say that the housing provider is best placed to deal with the problem. However, given the way that the bill is drafted and the way in which people are interpreting the provisions, the

perception is that we are talking about activities that take place not only in the home but also in the wider community. Given that context, the local authority is best placed to develop a comprehensive approach to the problem.

Matt Forde: The local authority will be in a position to pull together the different aspects of the issue. It is the local authority that has residual corporate responsibilities for areas such as children's welfare. Councils also have a dual responsibility for the impact on communities of children's behaviour in respect of the safety of the overall community and for securing the best outcome for the young people.

Some of the bill's provisions that relate, for example, to antisocial behaviour orders or new powers for the children's hearings system make demands on council services including social work services. As the committee knows, there is not an over-supply of social worker time—in fact, at the moment, supply does not meet demand. Local authorities have the responsibility to develop those measures and to make the best use of resources.

Dr Jackson: I want to ask about information sharing. I am sure that other members have also sat around tables with other people to discuss antisocial behaviour issues. Although discussions such as those are valuable, do you have any concerns about information sharing?

Matt Forde: I have just come from a meeting this morning of Glasgow's youth justice forum at which we reached a strong consensus about the welfare and needs of the children and young people who are involved in much of the most worrying behaviour. We agreed that we need to share information earlier and more effectively than we are managing at the moment. The members of the forum agreed to go ahead with identification of the young people who cause most concern. That way, we can ensure that we are taking the action that is required to safeguard the welfare of the young people and also that we are dealing with the issues that concern their families and communities. One issue that we are considering is whether existing protocols allow transfer of information, because some agencies have been worried about data protection issues.

I think that there is consensus that the welfare of children and young people is paramount, but does not stand in opposition to the need to tackle antisocial behaviour. Tackling problem behaviour in a young person often needs to be done in the context of understanding the needs of that young person. Young people who do not understand the consequences of their actions need to be made to understand, but they also need to be given the inputs that will change the way in which they behave in the future. The input of the school and of the social work department, the ways in which

the police and the children's reporter respond and what the hearing does about the young person's behaviour all need to be co-ordinated locally. Information needs to be shared in order to do that. Obviously, that is only one part of the picture as far as information sharing is concerned.

Phil Walker: As one who has been involved in the tortuous process of working with the police and a range of different agencies on the sharing of information from CCTV, I would say that we need to get better at sharing, collecting and storing information. It is really that simple.

Dr Jackson: I have one final question. Given those concerns, might it be necessary to establish some guidance or protocols about information sharing?

Matt Forde: Within our local authority area in Glasgow, there is an on-going discussion about a protocol on data sharing. That concerns principally Strathclyde police, the local authority and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. We aim to establish a framework within which we can all operate, but we are concerned to ensure that that process does not inhibit the information sharing that can go on right now in tackling issues and safeguarding children and communities.

Iain Smith: The bill will introduce a large number of new measures that will be available to local authorities for dealing with antisocial behaviour, most of which will be fairly resource intensive. Is there a danger that, given the shortage of resources, to which you have already referred, the bill's emphasis on enforcement will make it more difficult for councils to continue to provide the preventive diversion measures that they are currently attempting to provide?

Phil Walker: If we are really to tackle antisocial behaviour in a meaningful way, we need to start with the underlying causes. There is a continuum of activity in which enforcement has its place. I sympathise with communities that experience such behaviour and I can understand why enforcement is high on the agenda. However, if we really want to stop that behaviour in the long term, there needs to be a whole range of opportunities for young people—indeed, for everyone—so that they can fulfil their potential. They are, after all, the citizens of tomorrow. They are the future of the city.

The council recognises that and has taken quite a brave and comprehensive approach to the issue. We are opening up community schools and breakfast services and we are providing discounts for sports and leisure centres and all that sort of stuff. However, it takes a while and there is no short-term solution or simple panacea. There is a danger that, if we continually legislate for new things and make new things happen, we will never

have the time to bed down the new things that we are currently doing and that might be shown to work.

It is a case of things' becoming fashionable. We are constantly in times of reconfiguration of resources and services and we might be just about getting it right when we have to move on to something else. There is always that danger. Matt Forde will confirm that Glasgow is experiencing acute shortages in social work staff. In some areas, we are already finding it difficult to deliver on our statutory requirements.

Matt Forde: Let me add some specifics to that. Our pipeline has been quite full for a wee while; there are a lot of things in the pipeline and some of them are coming out at the other end. Over the past few years, the consequences of that have fed into the work force issues that were mentioned earlier.

I want to highlight some particular issues to do with the bill's provisions. Glasgow City Council very much concurs with the findings of Audit Scotland in its report "Dealing with offending by young people", which was published in December. That report found that there are problems in the system already. A key finding of the report was that too much time and money are spent processing and not enough time and money are devoted to delivering services in order to tackle the problems. The report also found that the money is in the wrong place in the system. Too much money is being spent once problems get out of hand—on residential secure care, for example—as opposed to being spent on community services, which are proved to work by the evidence available.

It is in the context of that information from Audit Scotland that we have to consider as processes—and not as services—the provisions of the bill on the introduction of antisocial behaviour orders for young people under 16, restriction of liberty orders, restriction of movement arrangements in the children's hearings system and community reparation orders for young people. Management of process will be required, with a case management approach taken. Essentially, social work-type activity will be required.

Let us take the example of a young person who receives an antisocial behaviour order. The system that will be created under the bill envisages the children's hearings system picking the case up and providing the necessary support package. The bill adds an extra bit of process. For a number of years, the frustration in the children's hearings system has been with the lack of adequate provision once it has been decided that a young person needs intervention. That frustration will remain unless we put new services in place. We have made a significant effort in that

regard over the past two or three years, and significant progress has been made towards putting those services in place. The issues around making the system work better go hand in hand with getting the services in place. Local authorities will have to consider carefully how to respond to the provisions in the bill when they are doing their planning.

The Convener: Several members wish to ask supplementary questions at this point, including Iain Smith, Paul Martin, Andrew Welsh and Michael McMahon. I ask everyone to be as concise as possible.

Iain Smith: I take it that Matt Forde does not view the problems as simply financial, and that he also recognises that there are issues to do with the availability of social workers. The financial memorandum accompanying the bill suggests that there will need to be up to 700 intensive programmes at a time in Scotland as a consequence of the bill, with an estimated additional cost on local authorities of about £13 million over 2004-05 and 2005-06. Have you had a chance to estimate whether that is a realistic figure and whether Glasgow City Council's resources can accommodate it?

Matt Forde: I will comment first from the point of view of the children's hearings system. At present, if a child is deemed by a children's hearing to require supervision, we, as the local authority, are obliged to provide that supervision. The aim is for supervision to be as meaningful as possible in providing services that address the underlying problems.

In its follow-up report, Audit Scotland found that there are still a number of children for whom the required supervision has not been implemented. From a realistic point of view, that number will grow. That is the difficult starting point. The council is working hard to move forward on the staffing side. It is considering how best to change its arrangements for the use of social workers' time, so that it can provide more services to more children and reduce the time that is spent on management and processing.

The answer to your question is that we have not had a chance to consider whether the cost estimate is realistic, because we are still trying to implement the basic level of service that existing statute requires. We know that the Executive has taken some steps to improve the supply of social workers, but it will take a number of years for that to have the desired effect. Social workers are not produced overnight. We are moving towards having a three-year qualification for social workers, which will slow up the provision of new social workers at some stage. That is the context from the local authority perspective.

Paul Martin: There is a great myth that police officers cannot share information. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 makes it clear that chief constables can share with other agencies information on antisocial activities. Will you confirm that chief constables can do that? Not sharing information has implications. For example, somebody could wreck a council house in Glasgow but, if information is not shared, they will have no difficulty whatsoever in finding alternative accommodation in another authority area. I know that we are struggling for time, but will you confirm those two points?

The Convener: It may be as well to relate those points to the proposals in the bill. The bill proposes a duty on chief constables and other named organisations to provide such information as local authorities may require.

15:15

Phil Walker: The chief constable can convey information; however, issues arise over the format and spirit in which that is done, and over the level of information conveyed. Generally, we would not require too many specific details. The police have a natural caution about sharing information and—to touch on Dr Jackson's earlier point—I think that any Scottish Executive direction that brings clarity to this discussion would be most helpful. Even though legislation allows the sharing of information, Executive direction would reassure agencies that they can actually share information.

Michael McMahon: I want to go back to points that were made earlier on partnership working. Children's reporters, children's hearings and the range of bodies that you spoke about in Glasgow will have to feed into that partnership working. The present proposals include giving the children's hearings system powers of sanction in cases where it is felt that a local authority is not providing supervision, education or services. How do you feel about that? Will that create problems in partnership working?

Matt Forde: In its response to the consultation on the bill, Glasgow City Council was concerned about those proposals, which are now provisions in the bill. It is almost as if a parallel track has been created. Young people can go down the children's hearings route, with all its underlying principles, but can then access, via a different route, the adult court system—albeit as children or young people.

The children's hearings system has been a matter of pride in Scotland. It is a unique and valuable asset. However, subjecting young people to some of the new provisions could compromise the system. Previously, the province of a children's hearing was entirely the welfare of the child. If

there is to be an added sanction element, the child would have to have the right to legal representation. That could change the nature of the discussions.

At hearings at the moment, the family is there, the agencies are there and lay members are there. The lay members are advised by an official and take decisions in the best interests of the child. However, as I say, there is a danger in having parallel systems. For example, a registered social landlord might initiate a process and a child might end up in court. That child will have to come back into the hearings system. The normal process will now be added to by a court process, which, in the end, will remit everything back to the hearings system anyway. There will be an added process, the effectiveness of which is not clear. Indeed, there is a danger that it will inhibit effectiveness by adding more administrative delays and demands to the system.

Michael McMahon: Might more administrative delays and demands arise in trying to deal with community reparation orders, which are also proposed in the bill? That would have implications for the services that the authority would be required to determine. What are your opinions about the proposed duty? What should the nature of the reparation work be and how much of a resource implication will it have?

Phil Walker: Without a doubt, community reparation would be very popular with communities. People would sense that there was natural and social justice in people putting something back into the community when they have broken something or taken from the community. Local authorities manage a similar service through community service orders. However, there is very little community input into how that service is directed or targeted and those orders usually relate to more serious crimes.

Community reparation orders are a difficult issue. There has not been much discussion within Glasgow City Council about where the service would reside and how it would be managed. There would be some difficulties in getting community input into what the reparation for the community should be. There are also potential issues about people from a community being explicitly marked within that community by carrying out reparation. That might exacerbate bad feeling rather than eliminate it. I think that the underlying philosophy is sound. It is a valuable approach, as reparation has been proven to work for both the victim and the offender, but the difficulty is how to manage the process well. It would be quite resource intensive to run the scheme practically and safely within communities.

Michael McMahon: You have highlighted an obvious concern about people having to carry out

a reparation order within their own community. If people knew that in doing so they would be identified as having committed crimes within their own community, would that act as an effective deterrent to such behaviour in the first place?

Phil Walker: It could, but a lot of the evidence on that is anecdotal. I reiterate that the philosophy is sound. Communities would like the proposal, as a certain natural justice is attached to it. There is an element of suck it and see. We will have to see how it works with people carrying out reparation in their own communities and in other communities.

The issue for me is that it is resource intensive to manage such a programme. I currently manage a restorative justice scheme. The elements that are similar to this proposal—although they are for younger people—are quite resource intensive, and the bill does not suggest that lots of new resources will go into the scheme.

Michael McMahon: Could community reparation orders be cost effective if they deal with broken-window syndrome? If we can get people to stop their antisocial behaviour, that will reduce costs in the longer term.

Phil Walker: Without doubt, prevention is better than cure. In the long term it is far less expensive to introduce a range of measures that stop crime or prevent it from happening again than it is continually to deal with enforcement.

Matt Forde: We must be clear about what community service orders are—they are a punishment. In England they are called community punishments. Although clearly the concept involves doing something in reparation, it is also a fine on one's time. The courts are obliged to use community service orders as an alternative to custody; if the order were not imposed, the alternative would be custody.

My reading of the community reparation order is that the same concept will apply, although the crime will not be on the same tariff. I have a concern about restorative justice for young people. There is limited evidence about the effectiveness of punishment per se in changing people's behaviour. One of the strengths of the restorative justice scheme is that it is based on international evidence about what works in reducing reoffending rates among young people. One of the vital elements of the scheme that we now have in Glasgow, which is based on that international evidence, is that we need the consent of both the young person who has committed the offence and the victim to engage in the process. The process of gaining that consent enables the young person to develop empathy for the victim's point of view. It also enables the victim to come to terms with situation, confront the offender and so on. International experience proves that those parts of

the process have an impact on the young person's subsequent behaviour.

In questions of offences, crimes and punishments, effectiveness and evidence are everything. They are extremely important to the victim from the perspective of reparation. The community reparation order works in that regard, but the question is whether it will be driven by the sanction element or the process. The compulsion element is seen to undermine the process.

Tommy Sheridan: I accept that you might not know all the answers to my questions but I would appreciate it if you could get back to me with the answers as soon as convenient.

I was struck by Phil Walker's statement that, if we are to tackle this problem, we have to tackle the underlying causes. What is the situation on the streets of Glasgow? How many people does the local authority employ at the coalface in relation to outreach work with groups of young people? What are the data on the availability of facilities and alternative positive recreational opportunities?

When you are estimating the size of the problem, are you able to compare the level of youth crime in Glasgow now with levels over the past 10 years? That would enable us to see whether the problem is huge and rising or whether the perception does not match the reality.

Two years ago, when I attended two children's hearings, I noted that five children who had been assessed as requiring protection orders had not been allocated a social worker because of the shortage of social workers. How many children in the city have been assessed as requiring child protection but have not yet been allocated a social worker?

Do you have figures for the uptake among young people of the initiatives that the council has introduced recently, particularly free swimming for under-18s? Are they being taken advantage of or ignored? Is there any way of measuring whether the young people who are involved in that sort of positive recreation are being diverted from more destructive activities? I know that it is hard to measure that, as subjective elements are involved, but are you working on ways of deciphering the information?

The Convener: I appreciate that you will find some of those questions difficult to answer, Phil, unless you have an extremely good memory. If you can answer them specifically, you should do so, but, if not, you could answer them in a letter to the committee.

Phil Walker: I think that I can do not too badly.

Glasgow has one of the largest youth services in Scotland, with around 90 youth workers. There has been a recognition that we have to reconfigure

that service into a youth service for the 21st century. Indeed, we are moving away from calling it youth services and starting to talk about services for young people, because a range of council departments have services for young people.

At the moment, through an on-going best-value review, we recognise that the new service that we will provide for young people will work with them more on the streets, in schools and in locations where young people go and less in traditional youth clubs. Further, community action teams have been in operation for two years and are starting to make an impact.

There is only so much work that we can do if the facilities are not available, however. In the 1960s and 1970s, a huge proliferation of schools was built in Glasgow but I suspect that there will not be a proliferation of new community facilities of that type now.

We are considering how to turn schools into community facilities that encourage children and young people to use them in the mornings before school and again after school. We are in the process of doing that work and, by January of next year, we will have established eight community clubs in areas of the city where the public are concerned about antisocial behaviour and youth disorder. We have already employed the staff for those clubs, which will be the first pilots.

I am also considering employing detached youth-work staff to work on the streets with kids who regularly appear on closed-circuit television. The workers can engage with them and get them into the clubs.

15:30

We would like there to be a tapestry of facilities across the city that can give a universal level of provision that is acceptable to young people and in which they want to participate. The most important point is, however, that there have to be workers who engage with, motivate and enthuse kids who are disengaged from the mainstream.

We are also considering bringing in agencies such as the Scottish Rocks—7ft basketball players—as peer-group models. We put on a series of twilight basketball events during the summer. We know that some kids sleep late, get up late and play late and we were trying to provide services for them when they wanted that provision.

We know that there is a correlation between social exclusion and the level of youth crime in Glasgow. Glasgow may have more than its fair share, but I have anecdotal evidence that shows that it is no worse than any other big city and probably better than some in the UK. I would like to go into that issue in some detail and will provide

the committee with a written submission, if that is acceptable.

Matt Forde is best placed to speak about allocated social workers.

Matt Forde: The youth justice forum meeting that I attended this morning agreed to publish a fact sheet that will provide information for the public, professionals and all others who are interested in levels of crime, reported crime and other measures such as the Scottish crime survey. The information will be about national levels, as well as those in Glasgow, of youth crime. Important divergences can occur between the public's view of those issues and the facts. That information will be provided at a forthcoming conference of community councils in Glasgow, and I can provide it to the committee.

The general picture is the suggestion from police statistics and other reported statistics that there has been a drop in crime, particularly during the past three to five years. The young offender prisoner population is reducing. There is mixed evidence—it is not as clear cut as people might think.

The most recent returns on social workers that we had to make to Audit Scotland were published last week in a follow-up report. They showed that more than 200 children in Glasgow had supervision requirements that were not being implemented and did not have an allocated worker.

Another measure can be seen in what is called the time intervals working group process, which is related to time standards in the children's hearings system. Last year, the time standard was for a child's supervision requirement to be implemented by an allocated social worker visiting that child within 15 working days. That time standard was met in 63 per cent of cases. I can add that all the supervision requirements that were allocated in that year were implemented, but not within the time standard.

Supervision requirements and child protection are prioritised but it must be understood that a social worker's case load is not just made up of child protection and supervision requirements. There is much more, but that work is often prioritised out when child protection and supervision are put at the top of the list.

The council aims to ensure that there are no unallocated child protection cases because those are the absolute priority. If there is an immediate likelihood of significant harm in a case, that case is prioritised. The council is also concerned to ensure that the responsibility is seen as going wider than the social work department. Everyone has a responsibility for child protection.

I would add that, of those children who are under supervision but who do not have an allocated case worker, not all of them receive no service. The contribution of different services can make a big difference. We estimate that up to 1,000 children a year will receive services from the restorative justice scheme that is now in place. The scheme will provide a service to a number of children who currently cannot get a service. That is one important element.

A second important element is the other supports that are available within social work services and schools—new learning communities, as we call them in Glasgow. Community and family support teams can provide a service to children who are deemed to need a service. Some children who do not have an allocated social worker in the core team still receive a service from other services such as the school-based support team or the area-based family support team.

Although there are serious issues of concern, every effort is made to prioritise the children within the hearings system.

The Convener: You mentioned the fact that the levels of recorded youth crime have dropped in recent years. Many community groups in my constituency have told me that they believe that a high degree of low-level crime goes unreported, either because people just do not see any chance of the crime being resolved or, sometimes, because of fears of intimidation. Do you receive such reports from community groups in Glasgow?

Matt Forde: I recognise that concern. That is why the fact sheet that we have put together tries to address those issues via different information sources, such as the Scottish crime survey. The Scottish crime survey is not about reported crime but about what people have experienced. People can tell of their experience of vandalism, window breaking, stone throwing or whatever it might be. Even some car crime goes unreported, so we know that reported crime on its own is a difficult measure.

It is important that the agencies involved recognise what people report as their experience of crime. Otherwise, it seems to the public that their genuine and valid concerns are not being taken on board. The Scottish crime survey figures do not provide evidence of any upsurge in youth crime. As I said, the Scottish crime survey methodology is not based on reports to the police.

Phil Walker: The crime that is at the highest level in Strathclyde is vandalism, the incidence of which is five times greater than that of all other crimes. It is also the type of crime that is most likely to go unreported. In Glasgow, vandalism costs the local authority about £8 million per annum. That is the type of crime that people see in

their communities and that affects their quality of life.

I want to respond to the point that was made about the free swimming initiative. Like many authorities, Glasgow City Council has issued a series of cards to young people that have an underpinning philosophy of promoting citizenship. Glasgow's youth card now has a distribution level of 80 per cent. The kidz card, which is issued to kids aged between five and 11, has a distribution level of 98 per cent. The cards allow free access to swimming and discounted access to sports and recreation. With free swimming, attendance levels among young people have increased by more than 300 per cent.

We know that there is a correlation between well-targeted, managed diversionary activities and reductions in low-level crime, such as the vandalism that I mentioned. We are currently considering how we can evaluate the impact of such initiatives to put the information on a more scientific level. We are also considering how we can use new technologies in our work with young people.

We are trying to develop a way of putting citizen points on to the cards that I have mentioned to encourage kids to go to sports centres, eat healthily, lead healthy lifestyles and get actively involved in communities and to promote good citizenship. The points would be redeemed against a series of things, either by individuals or collectively by groups, to reward kids for good attendance at school, homework and so on. We must enforce measures relating to antisocial behaviour, but see that in the broader continuum of how growing young people are nurtured. We should provide opportunities for young people to fulfil their full potential.

Mr Welsh: I want to change topics and deal with environmental services. The bill proposes to give local authorities the discretionary power to set up 24-hour, seven-day-a-week noise nuisance services. Would you consider providing such a service? If so, what would the cost implications be?

Phil Walker: We have already done so. I do not know the exact costs that are involved, but I think that around £200,000 to £250,000 per annum is needed. Recently, Glasgow City Council's environmental protection services department set up a 24-hour noise nuisance service.

Mr Welsh: Can you give members a rough idea of where the increased costs came from?

Phil Walker: I would have to speculate but, as we are talking about a new service, I suspect that they would come from either a revenue growth bid in the council or a reconfiguration of existing resources in the large department in question.

Mr Welsh: I thank you for speculating, but could you supply details to the committee?

Phil Walker: Certainly.

Mr Welsh: The bill proposes allowing local authority officers the power to investigate noise nuisance complaints. Whom have you appointed to investigate such complaints? The Scottish Executive envisages that "local authority officers" who would be charged with carrying out such tasks would be environmental health officers or community wardens. Whom did the council choose to undertake such tasks and why?

Phil Walker: Environmental health officers were chosen, but I would have to ask the director of environmental protection services why they were.

Mr Welsh: If you want to come back to us with information about that, that would be fine.

The bill proposes to extend the use of fixed-penalty notices for low-level fly-tipping offences, to bring that offence into line with littering. In addition, the bill provides Scottish ministers with the power to request public bodies to clear specific areas to certain standards. The Scottish Executive has stated in the financial memorandum that the costs of implementing the new provisions would be minimal. Do you agree with the proposals? Would the resource implications for your authority be minimal?

Phil Walker: The council agrees with the proposals. On resource implications, the council's environmental protection services department has already seconded a police officer to give enhanced credibility and experience to the enforcement aspects of the area of work in question, for which there are cost implications. I suspect that the cost implications will not be minimal. To do things properly, relatively significant costs will be attached, although I am not saying that those costs will be hugely significant.

Mr Welsh: The real problem with littering is how to identify and catch culprits. Will litter problems simply be passed on? Will local authorities simply be left to clean up the mess when nobody is proven to have dumped it?

Phil Walker: The issue for local authorities is that, even if a local authority officer identifies someone who is littering, that officer might not have the status or credibility in the public's perception to accost the individual to get their name and address and all their relevant personal details before a fixed-penalty notice can be issued. A parallel for consideration would be parking offences—a car would provide the information for a parking attendant. There are concerns about the safety of local government staff who accost members of the public for throwing down litter and

who try to get personal details to fine them. That is one reason why the council seconded a police officer.

Mr Welsh: Can you give us an idea of how many people are charged or fined for littering? Perhaps you could give us the figures for last year.

Phil Walker: I could do so, but not off the top of my head.

Mr Welsh: Was a small number of people charged or fined?

Phil Walker: Yes.

Mr Welsh: Would not the same apply to fixed-penalty notices for fly-tipping? Is it perhaps window dressing rather than anything that would be of practical use?

Phil Walker: That depends on how it is managed, implemented and resourced. Fly-tipping is relatively widespread in Glasgow and is of concern to communities and the council. Indeed, there are areas of the city where commercial firms from outwith the city come to dump. The council would welcome any opportunity to curtail that. The legislation is one thing; how we would resource and implement the legislation is the difficulty.

Mr Welsh: We would appreciate any comments that you would like to make at your leisure on the practical consequences.

Dr Jackson: I would like to ask about spray paint. The bill will ban the sale of spray paint to under-16s, and retailers will have to display notices to that effect. Trading standards officers, as well as the police, will enforce the legislation. Do you see any difficulties with the resource implications of that?

15:45

Phil Walker: Yes. There will be resource implications. The council feels very strongly about that issue. Glasgow suffers quite heavily from graffiti, especially in some areas. Indeed, there is a notorious website devoted to spray painting in Glasgow, and people from all over the UK come to visit and spray paint. I have a member of staff who is devoted to trying to eradicate spray painting in Glasgow.

Curtailing the sale of spray paint would help us in enforcing the legislation. There are cultures among young people, such as hip-hop and skateboarding, of which spray painting is part. There are shops in Glasgow where a young person can get a skateboard, knee pads and a helmet, which sell spray paint as well. One wonders why.

Dr Jackson: What about the resource implications of enforcing the legislation?

Phil Walker: If we have to do more to investigate, enforce standards and curtail the sale of spray paint to under-age children, that will be new work that will require new resources. That also pertains to regulating the sale of fireworks.

The Convener: I have a final question on resourcing issues. The bill provides for local authorities to be given discretionary powers to register private landlords. The financial memorandum provides an estimated cost for that of about £500,000 across all local authorities. Does Glasgow City Council have a view on whether that figure is likely to be sufficient, based on the proportion of that that you would normally expect to come to Glasgow?

Phil Walker: The council would perceive that to be tied in with the community reassurance work and the community relations work. That specific capacity would have to be developed within the council. To be honest, I have not examined the figures in detail, but if it is new work, there will be resource implications.

Some of the resource implications are quite hard to ascertain—for example, those relating to the local authority taking lead responsibility for antisocial behaviour orders in the private sector and the commercially owned sector, which is the largest sector in the city. It is hard to determine what the demand in those sectors will be. A year or two down the line, we will have a better feel for that. At the moment, demand for antisocial behaviour orders from those two sectors is low. However, I suspect that, on the back of the promotional publicity around the bill, people's heightened awareness of the ability to address the issue and the fact that the services will be in place so that people can pick up the phone and say that they need help, we might see quite a significant increase in demand.

The Convener: Thank you. As members have no further questions, I thank Phil Walker and Matt Forde for the evidence that they have given. It has been quite an intensive session. Thank you very much for your contribution. All your answers have been useful and will enable the committee to scrutinise the bill properly.

I suggest that, as our next witnesses are brought in, we take a short break and reconvene in three or four minutes' time.

15:49

Meeting suspended.

15:55

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome representatives from Highland Council. With us are Councillor Garry Coutts and Cath King, health improvement and community safety officer. David Goldie, head of housing strategy, will return in a moment.

Councillor Coutts has the opportunity to say some words of introduction on Highland Council's views on the bill.

Councillor Garry Coutts (Highland Council): You asked us to talk specifically about the rural aspects of the bill and we are quite happy to do so. It is probably better for us to do that in a question-and-answer session, but I will make a few general points.

We concur with many of the points that the witnesses from Glasgow City Council made during their discussion with the committee. It is without doubt a strong belief in communities throughout the Highlands that antisocial behaviour is a growing problem. We can have a debate about whether that is a perception or a reality, but there is no doubt that many communities perceive it as a growing problem and look to local authorities to work with the Scottish Executive to do something about it.

I am concerned that much of the rhetoric that we have heard and the publicity that has surrounded the bill have raised expectations that there will be a raft of measures that will eradicate much of the low-level antisocial behaviour that people experience. We need to work together to ensure that people have a clear understanding of the bill's actual provisions, how they will impact, and the things that they will not impact on.

There is a natural tendency to consider punitive and regulatory measures in relation to antisocial behaviour. However, as the witnesses from Glasgow City Council said, we are absolutely convinced that if we are to tackle the problem of antisocial behaviour, particularly offending behaviour by young people, we must consider positive interventions much more and try to modify people's behaviour. Having said that, I believe that we must do so within a climate in which we give support and reassurance to people who feel that they suffer from undue antisocial behaviour.

We have particular problems in rural parts of the Highlands and Islands. We heard from Glasgow City Council about initiatives such as opening schools at night but, in the Highlands and Islands, secondary schools might be 25 or 30 miles away from communities that experience antisocial behaviour. Crime statistics show that we do not have the levels of antisocial behaviour or criminality that exist in some urban places—we

respect and understand that—but if someone does display serious antisocial behaviour, the level of intervention that is required is just as intense as it would be in an urban area. Without the critical mass that is created by 25 or 30 cases, it is difficult to have sufficient capacity for an officer to go out and work with one offending family in a small Highland village. We need to do things differently and work with a range of agencies.

I will leave my introductory remarks there and hand over to Cath King or David Goldie, who has run back to the meeting. I hope that his car is still there.

David Goldie (Highland Council): The car is okay but I am not so sure about me.

The Convener: I hope that the City of Edinburgh Council has not made £60 from you.

David Goldie: I think that it is more than that now.

Cath King (Highland Council): Highland Council does a lot of work on antisocial behaviour, but we take a proactive and preventive approach. I will return to some of the points that Councillor Coutts made about rural communities. One of my biggest concerns is that, for us to work proactively with families, interventions should have no stigma attached to them. We have embraced the no-order principle and choose to follow it whenever possible in working with children and young people.

The provision of family support is our preferred way of working, partly because of the geography but really because everybody knows everybody's business and, in some communities, we know who the offending young people are. At present, we have 40 persistent young offenders in the Highland Council area. Our statistics show that fewer than 3 per cent of under-25s are involved in offending activity. We know pretty well who those people are, where they are and what they are doing. However, as the witnesses from Glasgow City Council said, some of the available orders are simply a process and not a service, whereas we are looking for additional services.

16:00

The Convener: As Councillor Coutts said, the representatives of Highland Council are here to draw out the rurality issues that arise from the bill. I ask members to address such issues as much as possible and to try not to duplicate areas of questioning on which there is agreement between Highland Council and Glasgow City Council.

Paul Martin: I asked the previous witnesses about the effectiveness of the Executive's consultation exercise. How did the exercise transfer to rural communities and was it effective? How do we communicate with rural communities? Would it be fair to say that, in consulting on the

antisocial behaviour strategy, the Executive focused more on urban communities than on rural communities?

Councillor Coutts: I will let Cath King answer the specific question about whether the consultation was rural focused but, in general, the process was fascinating because of the divergence of opinion in the responses. It would be difficult to produce an act that did not have the support of some of the consultees, but such an act would not please everyone. In rural communities, too, the responses were diverse. People who have experienced antisocial behaviour or who are in fear of it want a more punitive and firm line than people who have not come across such behaviour or those who think that we need to work to divert people away from antisocial behaviour and to modify their future behaviour.

We are seeing that debate. On the one hand, we are under great pressure to be seen to act tough where people are destroying other people's lives but, on the other hand, we know that, to a large extent, that does not work and we must work with families.

I will let Cath King answer the question about whether there was a rural-urban divide in the consultation.

Cath King: Our response to the consultation was definitely a Highland Council response, although we are aware that some of our communities responded directly. Our response was discussed at the renewing democracy and community planning select committee, at a full council meeting and at the joint committee on children and young people. On a wider basis, the response was discussed at the community safety local action teams—which include representatives of voluntary organisations and local people—at the multi-agency vandalism action group and at the youth justice steering group. I concur with Councillor Coutts that people are at opposite ends of the spectrum on the matter. Highland Council's view probably represents more the professionals' view, which comes from the evidence base on working with young people to change behaviour.

David Goldie: One major issue about managing the consultation was the degree of confusion in some people's minds about where the consultation fitted in with the consultation on community wardens, which was carried out around the same time. Highland Council is trying new actions on antisocial behaviour and on youth justice. Some of the new initiatives that have been introduced in the past year or so are beginning to bed down and people are beginning to understand them and to communicate with people locally about them.

Paul Martin: I appreciate that that is some of the content of the responses, but my point—

perhaps I did not put it across—was about whether people in the Highlands are aware of the concern about antisocial behaviour and whether they participated in the consultation. The Executive has said that the level of participation in the bill's consultation was unprecedented. Have people responded on some of the issues that are being dealt with? That is my main point, although I appreciate the other points that you make.

Councillor Coutts: There is no doubt that people in the Highlands share the concern that I have seen in Glasgow and other communities about a growing level of antisocial behaviour that blights their lives. We could debate whether that is because they are less tolerant of behaviour that has always gone on or because the level of such behaviour is growing, but people are concerned and they want something to be done.

A small minority of folk engaged in the consultation process. I do not think that many people would be able to articulate the differences that they will see once the bill is enacted, and even those who could do so would probably not be able to articulate clearly the long-term impacts that the bill might have.

Paul Martin: You said that the issue is serious in the Highlands, which everyone accepts. What action have you taken in your strategy to focus on the rural issue? Glasgow City Council's strategy might not fit into a rural strategy. Will you give us examples?

David Goldie: We have framed our antisocial behaviour strategy in our community safety strategy as part of our community planning framework. Within that, several initiatives are taking place. The geography of the Highlands always presents a challenge in making strategy and related action plans meaningful locally, given the different contexts and pressures in different parts of the Highlands, from the city of Inverness, which faces relatively common urban issues, to some of the very sparsely populated rural communities, where the issues are different.

Our approach to community safety involves having local action teams that deal with local issues. Those teams are formed from various partners that are involved in delivery locally. We have taken the same approach to an initiative on antisocial behaviour—the liaison protocol between housing services and the police, which we developed two or three years ago. That is based on information sharing. At local liaison meetings between housing services and the police, which are also attended by representatives of registered social landlords in those areas, housing-related antisocial behaviour issues and the pursuance of antisocial behaviour orders are discussed.

We must try to strike a balance between producing a council-wide strategy and

implementing that strategy in different local contexts. Usually, we do that by having area implementation groups and area partnership groups that deliver locally.

Paul Martin: I will ask you about a subject that we talked to Glasgow City Council about. Some organisations, such as local authorities and the police, have a statutory duty to be involved in community planning. However, that framework imposes no statutory duty on other agencies, such as registered social landlords, to participate. What are your views on enforcing strategies? What would happen if a registered social landlord was not interested in taking part in the process? What is your experience of that in the rural context?

David Goldie: That issue has not arisen so far in relation to our existing protocols. Perhaps we have been fortunate, but registered social landlords have been happy to be involved. In future, we will have to discuss some issues with partners locally, particularly in relation to antisocial behaviour orders and interim antisocial behaviour orders. Until now, it has been assumed that a local authority will lead and pay for all the work in relation to antisocial behaviour strategies.

We have a bit of work to do locally with partners on ownership and resourcing some of the actions that we will be taking. So far, we have had positive involvement from registered social landlords and other partners. For that reason, in our response to the consultation paper, we said that we did not feel that legislative change in relation to the involvement of other partners was necessary.

Michael McMahon: The representatives from Glasgow City Council expressed concerns about community reparation orders but also said that they saw merit in the proposal. Cath King mentioned stigmatisation. Stigmatisation by a community of an individual with mental health problems or disabilities is reprehensible and is something that that individual can do nothing about. However, the concept of stigmatising someone who has wrought havoc in a community and has been asked to make reparation to it is a concept that I had not grasped before. Could you elaborate on your concerns in that regard?

Cath King: Our concern relates to the fact that, in a rural setting, everybody knows everybody else. Previously, we have had to remove a young person to secure accommodation for his own protection because of such stigmatisation. We would want to avoid that at any cost. As I said, we want people to work with us proactively. That shapes our thinking about parenting orders and that side of the legislation.

The Glasgow City Council representatives mentioned the deterrence element of community service orders. However, I would argue that young

people who are in a cycle of offending behaviour are not thinking that far ahead. As they are not thinking that they are going to get caught, I am not sure how much of a deterrent the order would be.

The principle of community reparation is good. If a window is repaired as soon as it is broken, that can prevent further windows from being broken. However, we would have to examine carefully the implementation of the order in a rural situation.

Michael McMahon: If, as you say, the offenders are easily identified, they will already be known to their communities. That means that their being asked to make reparation in the community hardly adds to the knowledge that the community has of the individual.

Cath King: I agree. That is a fair comment about community reparation orders, but I was raising the question of what added value we will get from using the other sorts of orders, given that we already know who the people are. Reparation is a slightly different issue.

Michael McMahon: I asked the Glasgow City Council representatives about the relationship between local authority services and children's hearings panels, specifically the powers being given to the children's panels to act if the council is not acting. What are the implications of that for the way in which you deliver services?

Cath King: I would have concerns about that because I believe that a split could develop between children's panels and social work services. The only reason that I could think of for a supervision requirement not being implemented would be that there were no services available due to staffing and resource issues. My understanding is that the children's panel in Highland is crying out for more services rather than for more powers. I know that the children's panel feels frustrated when programmes are not implemented. We have tried to address that by introducing the trainee social worker scheme in an attempt to get people into the service. The recruitment difficulties that are experienced nationally due to the shortage of social workers are compounded in Highland, because we also have to ask people to come to work in an extremely rural, west coast setting. On the main point of your question, I would have grave concerns about the children's panel going to a sheriff to compel the local authority to comply.

Michael McMahon: The issue comes down to resources. The Scottish Executive estimates that the cost of implementing antisocial behaviour orders and electronic monitoring will be £13 million in 2004-05 and 2005-06. Does that sound like a realistic figure to you? Have you produced a similar estimate?

Councillor Coutts: We have not produced a detailed costing for that. The figure of £13 million

seems light to us. Our main concern is that we believe that positive interventions can be made that would be more effective. Children's panels and others who are engaged with children and young people say that any additional resources should go to social work staff.

16:15

Mr Welsh: You mentioned that in a rural area most folk know one another. You know who and where your clients are. Does that knowledge make problems easier to solve? You are dealing with people who are isolated and feel vulnerable to the sort of activity that we are discussing.

Councillor Coutts: The fact that in rural areas people know one another can make problems both easier and harder to solve, but in the long term it probably makes it harder. It is much harder to get witness statements to begin action against someone who is misbehaving, because it is much easier to identify who is making the complaint. Naturally, there is less support for people in small rural areas. There is no doctor's surgery or social work presence. Not every community has council employees to whom people can speak and from whom they can seek advice. It is much harder to get support to people to help them to sort out their problems. Once people who have offending behaviour have been stigmatised, they feel tarred for life. They then have less incentive to try to modify their offending behaviour.

Before I moved to the Highlands, I worked in Craigmillar in Edinburgh. In large urban centres, folk have opportunities to modify their behaviour. They may continue to live in a close community, but they may work somewhere else and need not continue to go to the same pub. It is easier for people in an urban centre to remove themselves from the influences to which they were subject than it is for those in a rural setting. In a rural village, once someone is painted as the bad bugger, the paint sticks.

Mr Welsh: To what extent does the bill meet rural needs? How do you implement sanctions and monitor from a distance?

Cath King: We have social work teams in rural areas and youth action teams that are spread across the Highlands. We also have youth offending forums that focus on the top 10 offenders in each area. Those forums are not seeking new powers from us. They are saying that there are not enough services and that more initiatives such as NCH's intensive supervision and the work that Safeguarding Communities-Reducing Offending is doing with young people in Highland are needed. The new community schools approach is identifying children with offending behaviour much earlier and people are liaising

with one another in the area through children's service forums.

Distance is an issue, as our nearest secure accommodation facility is 120 miles away. It is that near only if one travels over the mountains, which is not always possible at all times of the year. If young people go up the tariff, as it were—some of the interventions for which the bill provides may have that result—there is a risk that children will leave the area, family relationships will break down and we will not be able to work with people in a proactive way.

David Goldie: I imagine that the impact of serious antisocial behaviour on victims is just as bad in a rural as in an urban setting. In rural areas, there are particular issues associated with the difficulty of being a witness and the visibility of acute problems. Some of the challenges in implementing the bill are linked to rurality.

No doubt some of the examples that we heard from the Glasgow City Council representatives will also be given by the witnesses from North Lanarkshire Council. One example is the question of specialist teams. Given the relatively low numbers of serious cases in an area such as the Highlands, it would be quite difficult for us to resource and run specialist teams.

At present, for example, it is relatively difficult for us to run a mediation scheme. We bid for £65,000 under the community warden-related initiatives to set up a pilot mediation scheme. We costed the scheme through SACRO. The pilot scheme will cost, depending on how we want to run it, between £190,000 at the upper end and £160,000 at the lower end. We are faced with the challenge of how to resource a community mediation scheme in the Highlands.

Issues also arise about how to resource fixed-penalty notices and other such measures. Given the sheer practicalities that are involved in being able to spot fine someone in an area the size of Belgium, it will not be easy to serve a notice on somebody or to witness antisocial behaviour. Similar issues arise in relation to the private rented sector, including registration. The nature of the rural setting will mean that it is difficult to implement some of the provisions in the bill; it will certainly be difficult to apply them equally in urban and rural settings.

The Convener: You mentioned registration of the private rented sector. Have you conducted an estimate of the cost to Highland Council of setting up such a scheme?

David Goldie: Not in relation to the bill. To be honest, we are still struggling with the registration of houses in multiple occupation. The only practical option is for us to try to deal with the private rented sector issues that arise from the bill

in the same way as we are trying to manage HMO issues, and then join them up. We have not costed the provisions of the bill in relation to the private rented sector in the Highlands.

Iain Smith: You have covered some of the issues that I was going to address. I think that it would be fair to say that Highland Council was, in its response to the consultation document, fairly critical of the Executive's proposals. You said:

"The proposals reflect concerns from highly urbanised ... large public housing schemes, which benefit from economies of scale in terms of service provision and do not reflect the needs or realities of working with communities and young people in Highland."

One concern is that some of the provisions of the bill would impose inappropriate urban solutions on rural situations. There is also a concern that some of the provisions cut across services that Highland Council provides at present. Will the bill make it more difficult for you to provide those services? Is the Executive providing you with inappropriate solutions that you may not want to use?

Councillor Coutts: The biggest problem for us is that the Executive is providing solutions that are not appropriate to Highland. We have heard the representatives from Glasgow City Council. Last week, I heard a presentation from North Lanarkshire Council about the initiatives that it has put in place. We will not be able to deal with antisocial behaviour in the same way as those councils can.

People from lots of services make an input into tackling antisocial issues. It is not possible for us to say, "Right, we are going to create an antisocial behaviour team across the Highlands." We are talking about bits of jobs—part of a head teacher's job, part of a housing manager's job or part of an environmental health officer's job. It is not as though there are 20 people who can be pooled into a central team that is to deal with antisocial behaviour. Some councils are looking at solutions that involve the creation of teams that will enable them to take advantage of the bill. We cannot do that.

Iain Smith: Let me expand on that slightly. Will some of the additional duties and powers that the Executive is to place on local authorities make it more difficult for you to do what you want to do in your communities?

David Goldie: The existing legislative framework allows us to do a lot of things. It also allows us to do things that we want to do. There is a need to deal effectively with the most serious instances of antisocial behaviour—I do not argue with that. However, that has not always happened, partly because it is difficult to deal with those cases. We remain to be convinced that implementation of the bill as drafted will make it

easier to deal with serious cases. I guess that it will always be difficult to deal with such cases.

The issue for us is less about how much the bill will help us to take action in the future than about how we use the measures in the bill and the existing legislation to work out a strategy for dealing with the problem, given the rural nature of many of the areas in which we work. We need to develop the best strategies that we can and we want as many of our partners as possible on board so that we can deliver those strategies.

We are already doing a lot within the existing legislative framework. Some of the frustration that has been expressed in our response to the bill has probably come from a feeling that the bill—or the publicity around it—has perhaps concentrated on the small minority of very serious and intractable cases, while ignoring a lot of the good, preventive work that is taking place or has the potential to take place. We would prefer to have had time to carry out a proper appraisal of some of the initiatives that we have implemented over the past year or so, particularly in relation to youth justice.

Dr Jackson: Paul Martin and the previous witnesses mentioned that a lot of information sharing may already be taking place. I am sure that most of us have been involved in that. What information sharing do you take part in at present? How might the bill enhance that process? Should guidance and protocols on information sharing be put in place? I put that last question to the witnesses from Glasgow City Council, too.

David Goldie: We are fortunate in that we have a protocol with the police in relation to information sharing in antisocial behaviour cases, which works very well. To be honest, I am not sure why it has not been possible to do the same thing in other areas, although I should add in fairness that the development of the protocol took a long time and involved a lot of discussion. Clearly, there are sensitivities about confidentiality. We framed our protocol in terms of the appropriateness of information exchange in particular circumstances. Much of that work is backed up at the regular meetings at which we discuss cases. That is an example of something that works well in the Highlands.

Councillor Coutts: Housing associations are involved in the protocol, too.

Paul Martin: All the parties concerned have to want the information at the same time. Perhaps this is as much an observation as a question, but the issue is about more than a desire for legislation. When a housing officer asks a police officer for information, the police officer has to respond if the process is to work. Does the information that is requested get lost in what I call the Bermuda triangle? People can get lost in the

system. How can you ensure that housing and police officers work together to share information?

Councillor Coutts: Our protocol formalises that process. People are expected to attend meetings and share any information that they might have. As the chair of the Highland Council housing committee, I signed the protocol, as did the chief constable, the chair of the police board and representatives of the local housing associations. The protocol was not just an agreement between a couple of officials, which does not work on the ground; it came from the top and people are expected to follow it.

I have not got to the bottom of the matter, but I believe that there can be a problem with evidence sharing when we want to use witness statements so that we can move quickly to go down the ASBO route. The police may want to use the same witness statements in relation to a more serious offence that is going through the courts and we cannot get access to that information until it has been to the sheriff court. I do not know why that is or whether it is something that we can resolve, but the problem has delayed us in at least one case that I am aware of in which we were unable to apply for the antisocial behaviour order earlier.

David Goldie: In relation to information sharing, there are inevitably some difficulties with specific bits of information, but that illustrates the complexity of the problem. We have a relatively good information exchange based on a clear protocol that names the officers responsible for exchanging information. That does not solve the problem of how we pursue cases in court. It helps us with one part of the process, but we still have to gather reliable evidence and present it in court and we still have to make a case before the sheriff. The protocol helps, but it is only part of the process.

16:30

David Mundell: I would like to come back to a point that you made a moment ago, Mr Goldie. What you said was similar to what the witnesses from Glasgow were saying about the difficulty of taking on new requirements before other requirements had bedded in and been assessed for effectiveness. Is that one of your concerns about the proposals?

David Goldie: In the council's consultation, in which there was particular emphasis on youth justice issues, there was a strong feeling that the youth justice initiatives that have been taken over the past year or so—in relation to fast-track hearings, youth court pilots, restorative justice and community schools—were more appropriate than some of the measures outlined in the bill. We would have liked a chance to see how those

initiatives were going and to evaluate them. In fact, the council has just committed to a three-year evaluation of the impact of a new set of integrated children's services, which include youth justice services. We need to evaluate how those services are working in what are important years of a young person's life. That is the concern that we were expressing in our response to the consultation.

David Mundell: Both the relatively large rural authorities in my South of Scotland region have undertaken a housing stock transfer. I am not sure whether that is on the agenda in the Highlands, but would a transfer of the council's housing stock to a social landlord affect your approach to the issue? If there were a transfer, would the council still be in the best position to lead on the issues relating to the bill?

Councillor Coutts: Highland Council decided that, unless there are significant changes to circumstances, we would retain our stock, although we will continually review that position. Goodness knows what things such as the housing quality standards will throw at us. We have not started considering that, but we were talking about it with our colleagues from Glasgow while we were waiting outside and heard what they were saying. Some challenging issues will be thrown up.

At the moment, a lot of the costs are held on the housing revenue account, because an awful lot of the work involves people who are council tenants. If local authorities no longer have an HRA, will we have the powers to ensure that that expenditure is met from elsewhere? Is it appropriate for that cost to be met from elsewhere or should there be additional resource coming to the local authority? There will be a resource issue if transfers take place and it will be interesting to see what Communities Scotland, as the regulator, will make of the fact that the new landlord in Glasgow is picking up a lot of those costs. I am not giving a view one way or the other, but it will be interesting to see what happens and a lot of people will be watching.

David Mundell: That is interesting. We have talked about consultation on the bill, but how will you progress consultation on developing antisocial behaviour strategies?

David Goldie: I stress that Highland Council has not discussed or made a decision on that issue, but at this stage I envisage that we would develop our antisocial behaviour strategy within our community planning framework. In other words, we would develop our existing community safety strategy so that, in effect, it became our antisocial behaviour strategy. That would involve input from a number of other council services and external agencies. Our existing community safety strategy will give us a platform on which to develop a more specific approach to antisocial behaviour.

Councillor Coutts: I do not think that we will have a problem in ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to contribute to and to comment on the development of our antisocial behaviour strategy, but at the moment we are consulting on God knows how many strategies and I would not hold my breath on the impact of the responses, how well thought through they are and how many people will choose to engage effectively in the process. We will make every effort to consult through the community engagement strategies that we are working on. We are keen to do that, but it ain't easy—there are not many people who are queueing up to chat to us about antisocial behaviour orders.

Cath King: We have carried out some public consultation on our antisocial behaviour strategy as part of the consultation on the bill. Recently, we held a community safety seminar and I envisage that we will repeat that process. I co-facilitated three workshops that each had about 25 people in them. Antisocial behaviour is a highly emotive subject; people want to come and talk about it. In my view, the community safety strategy will be a key part of the process. We would take the consultation out to area level, because we have local action teams in each area.

David Mundell: You mentioned the wider issue of availability of staff in rural areas, which is a problem right across Scotland, including my own region. In a community such as Stranraer, it is extremely difficult to recruit social work staff. That is not just a resource issue and no one seems to have the magic answer. Although we have been recruiting dentists from Spain, I do not see us getting social workers from Spain quite so easily.

Cath King: The issue is complex. Leaving social workers aside, I will mention a street-work project in one of our small towns in which we expected people to work until late on Friday and Saturday nights. When those staff left, new staff could not be recruited. That issue affects not just qualified social workers; it applies across the board. The fact that there are so many different initiatives involving young people means that we are starting to dip into the same pool of people—for example, the drug and alcohol action teams are dipping into the same pool of people as Careers Scotland is—and the pool is getting smaller all the time.

David Mundell: I have a final point on the general thrust of the bill. Vehicle-related activity—in particular, youngsters congregating in small towns in vehicles and the boy-racer phenomenon—is still high up on the antisocial behaviour radar in rural areas. It is fortunate that my experience of the problem is at a relatively low level. Are you confident that the measures in the bill will be able to encompass some of those activities?

Cath King: I think that they will be able to do that, although there is probably existing legislation to deal with most such issues. The publicity around the bill and the consultation is in danger of raising people's expectations and making them start to describe antisocial behaviour when they are really talking about young people who are hanging around at a bus stop and maybe not doing anything. The raising of the public's perception of what we can do is one of my concerns. In the workshops that I mentioned, we asked people to tell us what antisocial behaviour was and then we asked them to split that up into what mechanisms were in place to deal with its various different aspects. It was very difficult to find anything for which there was not an existing mechanism. The mechanisms are not always well enough resourced to make them work properly.

Councillor Coutts: I think that I must have been antisocial if that sort of thing was classified as such.

Mr Welsh: I note that you have some very specific views about the bill's proposals on environmental services. For example, the bill seeks to establish 24-hour, seven-days-a-week noise nuisance services, but you say that you are against using community wardens for that purpose. In that case, who should be in charge and what would be the cost implications for your council? Are you going to take action on that matter and, if so, how?

Councillor Coutts: As none of us present is the expert in our council on the matter, I would be more than happy to furnish the committee with some more detail later. However, I should point out that a 24-hour service might be based in Inverness. If the party causing the disturbance is in Thurso, there would not be much point in heading off to monitor the noise because they would be snoring by the time we reached them.

Mr Welsh: I look forward to your written response to my questions.

Councillor Coutts: We will certainly provide one.

Mr Welsh: One of the banes of rural life is fly-tipping, which is a nuisance to landowners who have to clean it up and is an eyesore in the environment. The bill seeks to introduce fixed-penalty notices for fly-tipping, but you have described that proposal as not sensible. How would you get to grips with the problem in rural areas, particularly in the Highlands? Are existing powers adequate?

Councillor Coutts: If you are going to use such measures as fixed-penalty notices for fly-tipping, you have to catch people in the act. In a landscape such as the Highlands, it is difficult to ensure that every road, lay-by, passing place or

glen is covered. It would not be productive to put an awful lot of resources into such policing activity. Instead, we should make people aware of the environmental consequences of fly-tipping and ensure that it does not take place. We would be pushing a pea up a hill with our noses if we tried to catch every incidence of fly-tipping across a landscape such as the Highlands.

Mr Welsh: So I presume you agree with the Executive's statement that the costs of implementing such a scheme would be minimal.

Councillor Coutts: They will be very minimal for us.

Dr Jackson: What are your views on banning under-16s from purchasing spray paint and on putting up notices to that effect? Will that measure have any implications as far as enforcement is concerned?

Cath King: There are questions about how we would enforce such a measure. My understanding is that in Scotland we do not have the ability to carry out test purchasing, so we cannot simply send someone under 16 into a shop to check on the matter. I am not clear about who will enforce the measure; indeed I am not sure about whether enforcement of existing age-related measures has been effective. It might be sensible to restrict the sale of spray paint in some way; however, as we point out in our response, there are human rights issues to consider. After all, a young person might well be buying paint for a legitimate purpose.

David Goldie: There might be some difficulties in implementing this part of the legislation. I would like to draw an analogy with the purchase of cigarettes; all shops carry warning notices saying that it is illegal to sell tobacco to under-16s. However, if young people want to access cigarettes or spray paint, they will find a means of doing so. That is an enforcement issue for trading standards and the police, but I wonder how effective that part of the bill will be in practice.

Councillor Coutts: We also have to be careful that our response remains proportionate. For example, our Glasgow colleagues said that they have particular hot spots and that the legislation might assist them in dealing with that problem. If so, that is fine. However, we do not have hot spots or spray-painted ghettos that we need to hammer down on.

Mr Welsh: The very sparse population in rural areas makes it difficult to apply measures that are probably designed for urban areas. As a result, there is a feeling of helplessness: for example, is our countryside vulnerable to fly-tipping?

This is a double-edged sword, because people in villages and small rural areas have eyes and ears and know one another. I wonder how we

could involve communities in that respect. When a village in my constituency suffered from a case of vandalism, one could see people's shock. The community was up in arms but responded positively by working with the police to form neighbourhood action groups and become the police's eyes and ears. That approach has been very effective. As I have said, there is a sparse population in the Highlands, but we have to remember that the people out there who want a decent countryside to live in also have eyes and ears.

Councillor Coutts: There is merit in that idea. We work on such initiatives with our community councils. Communities can be very effective if they perceive a threat from outside. If people come into a community and fly-tip, we will soon hear about it and a number of cars will be identified. However, if someone from within a community is fly-tipping, we do not hear a thing.

The Convener: That brings us to the end of the questions that we have for this panel of witnesses. I thank Councillor Garry Coutts, Cath King and David Goldie for the evidence that they have given. I wish you a safe journey back to the Highlands and hope that you do not have a parking ticket to welcome you back to your car.

16:45

We move straight into the next evidence-taking session. I welcome Matt Costello, the principal investigator of North Lanarkshire Council's antisocial task force. We invited North Lanarkshire Council to give evidence partly because of the reported success of its antisocial task force. Before we move to questions from members, I invite Matt to make some introductory remarks about North Lanarkshire Council's experiences and about the ways in which the bill may aid the task force in the future.

Matt Costello (North Lanarkshire Council): I am the manager of North Lanarkshire Council's antisocial task force. The team was set up three years ago to deal with serious cases of antisocial behaviour throughout North Lanarkshire, and we tend to deal with cases across all tenures. A few years ago, we recognised the fact that there was a problem with antisocial behaviour in North Lanarkshire, but we did not really have a handle on the level of complaints that we were receiving. In addition, we did not know whether we had an accurate picture of the kind of complaints that people had. The team was set up to try to get a better handle on the situation and to deal with cases more effectively.

We have utilised quite effectively the existing legislation—both housing legislation and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998—but we welcome the

proposals in the bill. As far as the antisocial task force is concerned, the introduction of antisocial behaviour orders for under-16s could be beneficial. The formulation of an antisocial behaviour strategy between ourselves, our partners in the council and other agencies in North Lanarkshire could be extremely effective.

There are several areas in which we feel that the legislation will impact very positively and effectively, tying in with the proposals in the "Building strong, safe and attractive communities" document, which was put out for consultation earlier this year. The antisocial task force will implement a lot of the proposals in that document, and we welcome the proposals in the bill.

The Convener: Thanks very much. I ask members to concentrate on the lessons that we can learn from the task force that North Lanarkshire Council has introduced and the ways in which the bill will supplement the task force's work and improve its operation.

Michael McMahon: I have been looking at the referral source breakdown and have found that 104 referrals have been made to you by elected members. I think that I might be included among those elected members.

Matt Costello: You will be.

Michael McMahon: I highly commend the work that the antisocial task force does for North Lanarkshire Council; however, I am aware of some of the practical difficulties that you experience, one of which relates to the dispersal of gangs. I see from your submission that you think that you could benefit from the bill's proposals in that respect.

Concerns have been raised about civil rights, rights of association and young people not being allowed to assemble as they would in other circumstances. However, my reading of the matter is based on the practicalities that you have experienced. It is easy to identify a gang that is operating in a specific geographical area—the police know who they are and you know who they are.

When a report is made that the gang is operating in the area on a particular night, the noise might abate when the police or the antisocial task force turn up. People create the impression that they are not causing any difficulty, but it can be quite apparent that their presence is causing difficulties in the local community.

Will the bill allow the antisocial task force and the police to deal with such situations in the areas that we represent? Will the bill overcome the practical problems in making communities safer by allowing you to break down the behaviour that those gangs employ?

Matt Costello: You are right that a major aspect of the way in which our antisocial task force operates is that it is very much based on evidence that is gathered from numerous sources. We certainly support that aspect of the bill, as we could contribute information to the police about the dispersal of groups. The evidence that my staff have gathered by taking witness statements could be shared with the police so that the power is used in a targeted way. I think that the police share the view that the bill would give them a targeted power.

We are not out just to move people on from one area to another if they are doing nothing. Many people stand in the street or at bus shelters without causing damage or vandalism. We are not particularly interested in those who just happen to be in the area. Our interest is in the cases where there are clear problems of antisocial behaviour, such as vandalism, graffiti or harassment of people who are walking up and down the street. In cases where we have evidence, the power could be targeted. We certainly support that aspect of the bill.

Michael McMahon: Would other aspects of the bill particularly help you in your work? Have you identified any practical issues where you would like powers to be able to go a step further or where you see gaps in what is currently available?

Matt Costello: Do you mean in the bill generally?

Michael McMahon: Yes.

Matt Costello: We certainly support the introduction of antisocial behaviour orders for under-16s. The statistics in my written evidence show that there are a high number of complaints from people about disorder caused by gangs of children and youths in the North Lanarkshire area. Not all those cases have required action from us, but a large number certainly involve people who are under 16 years of age. Our hands are very much tied as we do not have the powers that we require to deal with those cases effectively. We very much support that aspect of the bill.

The bill would allow antisocial behaviour orders to be imposed on people aged between 12 and 15. We have evidence from cases in North Lanarkshire that the problem can start at a much earlier age. We could gather evidence of such behaviour by children of 10 years of age. The statistics demonstrate that that is a particular problem in our area.

We see antisocial behaviour orders as being a preventive as well as a punitive measure. In North Lanarkshire, 54 antisocial behaviour orders have been granted, of which only a handful have been breached. The orders that have been put in place are having the desired effect, in that they are

contributing to the person's modifying their behaviour to such an extent that the order is no longer required. When the order has not been breached, no further action is necessary. The orders can be looked at in two ways. They have a punitive side, especially when they are breached, but they also contribute as part of a preventive approach in the early stages.

Michael McMahon: In the area in which your antisocial task force operates, North Lanarkshire Council is a major landlord, which you can operate through. In my experience, some local housing associations and private landlords are not as co-operative and supportive of the work that is done by the antisocial task forces and the police. Is that also your experience? Will the bill help to address that? Are there gaps in the bill? Would more stringent recommendations be required to force registered social landlords and private landlords to co-operate with the work that you do?

Matt Costello: There are certainly clear issues and challenges in the private rented sector. Identifying landlords in the private sector is quite difficult, so some form of registration scheme would be valuable. That would allow us to get a handle on who is operating in the area and how we can work with them. We would want to bring them on board, make them part of the neighbourhood compacts that will be created and involve them in the other work that we are undertaking.

The situation has improved recently in our work with the RSLs. We work closely with them and the majority have now signed up to service-level agreements with the task force to buy into our services so that their tenants can also benefit from the 24-hour service, investigation service and professional witnessing that the task force provides. We are also considering the development of a mediation bank with our RSL partners. There are positive moves in that area. RSLs will contribute greatly to the antisocial behaviour strategy as it develops.

Paul Martin: Some of the points that I was going to raise have been touched on, but I have one question for Matt Costello. We will go through the process of delivering the bill and it will receive royal assent some time next year. Is the worry not that in two years' time somebody will come to the committee to tell us about the number of other hurdles that have appeared in the process of trying to tackle antisocial behaviour?

I know that the question is difficult and that we are all trying to get to grips with it, but how do we wipe the slate clean and address all the possible excuses that might be given—there are plenty of excuses out there—whether by the police or local authorities? I mean no disrespect to you, but every local authority might say, "I am afraid that the

existing legislation"—or the procedures or the courts—"makes it very difficult for us to deal with the problem of antisocial behaviour." How do we wipe the slate clean? How do we remove all those hurdles? That touches on the issue of whether North Lanarkshire Council has been consulted on the proposals. I do not want to see you back here in two years' time saying that there is another problem in the system that we were not made aware of while we were considering the bill.

Matt Costello: That is not an easy question to answer. It is difficult to know how we can say that this is how we will take the matter forward and deal with the situation. As with any piece of legislation that deals with a complex problem, it would be unwise to say that the bill will do everything that is expected of it. People's perceptions of the problem, the realities of the problem and the extent of the problem are different across the board.

The bill does a lot to address the issues that have been raised. We have certainly been consulted on the bill and we have consulted the wider community on it. Several of the issues that the community has raised are reflected in my response to the bill, which covers many of the matters that we have been examining. There is concern over a couple of issues that might cause complication or confusion. However, we believe that the bill is a good starting point from which local authorities and other partners can move forward and try to tackle the problem.

Paul Martin: Everyone wants to do something. Has any item on your wish list not been included in the bill?

Matt Costello: Regardless of whether the bill is the mechanism through which we achieve the aim, we all want court processes to be speeded up. We want improved communications between ourselves and the police and other organisations. We want that process to be speeded up and made easier, but other legislation prevents that from happening. It might help us to speed the process up if we could wipe out a few other pieces of legislation, but obviously that cannot be done. We must work within the framework that exists.

One issue, which relates back to the building safer communities initiative, is the time scales that we are given. We have funding for the next couple of years. As a result of the additional funding from the initiative, we will set up additional teams and we will examine a neighbourhood warden scheme for a couple of years. However, short-term funding such as that does not always contribute to effective community planning in the longer term. Because of the funding concerns, we are limited in how far we can take our strategy on antisocial behaviour.

Mr Welsh: You said that you want to speed up the process but that some legislation prevents you from doing so. What legislation are you talking about?

Matt Costello: I was talking anecdotally. We talk about sharing information between ourselves and the police, but data protection legislation and human rights legislation must be taken into account. That is perfectly understandable and acceptable, but it prevents the process from moving more quickly.

Mr Welsh: I just wanted to be clear about what you were saying.

Dr Jackson: I will deal with my three points together. First, I assure the witnesses that the dispersal of groups can be a rural problem as well as an urban one. Are there any ways in which the bill should be amended to make dispersal easier? Secondly, if you have carried out around 50 ASBOs, that will have involved quite a bit of information sharing between agencies. Will the bill improve information sharing and, if so, how? What is the role of protocols and guidance and what protocols do you have in place already? Finally, how will the ban on the sale of spray paint to under-16s be enforced?

17:00

Matt Costello: A large number of ASBOs have been put in place in North Lanarkshire, which has involved effective information sharing between the council, the police, RSLs and other agencies. Statutory protocols for information sharing may help in some areas—and perhaps in ours—but we have been lucky with the protocols that have been developed. We have no major problems with information sharing. We embark on joint training with the police and RSLs, focusing on how the council operates, what our powers are under existing legislation and what we can do to assist those groups. The police and RSLs speak to us on the same issues. We speak to different police shifts and we ask for the information to be cascaded to as many people as possible to ensure that we cover the majority of people who are involved. That process has been effective in raising awareness of the local authority's powers and has contributed effectively to information sharing. The police are aware of what they can tell us and how the information can be treated most effectively.

It would be helpful to have clarification of what the power to disperse groups will actually achieve. Many people say that the bill stigmatises and pillories young people. It should be made clear that that is not the intention and that the power will be targeted at people on the basis of evidence gathered. The power is part of an overall strategy of giving the local authority and police the ability to

deal with antisocial behaviour. The intention should be made clearer.

Spray paint is an issue in North Lanarkshire. We have a problem with graffiti and have set up a graffiti hit squad to try to respond as quickly as possible. I share the view expressed by colleagues from other local authorities that the enforcement of a ban on selling spray paint to under-16s will be difficult. There is evidence from the experience with other bans, for example those on the sale of cigarettes or alcohol, that people get somebody else to buy the banned things for them. Unless the system is closely monitored, it could be difficult to enforce the ban.

Iain Smith: Some of today's witnesses have said that a number of the problems of dealing with antisocial behaviour arise because of a lack of services. For example, the ability to provide supervision orders is limited because of a lack of social workers. Is there a similar problem in North Lanarkshire? When you try to implement your existing strategy through your antisocial behaviour task force, are you occasionally stymied by a lack of resources?

Matt Costello: North Lanarkshire suffers from the same problems of social work staff recruitment as other local authorities do. I cannot comment further on that issue because I am in the housing and property services department.

We have a protocol with the social work department for antisocial behaviour cases. If we feel that child protection issues, youth issues or older people's issues arise in the case, we refer the matter to the social work department. Through the supporting people fund, a tenancy support team has been set up in North Lanarkshire, from which we regularly access support. There are other areas from which support can be gathered to ensure that we tackle the issues that are raised in our investigations.

Iain Smith: In its evidence, Glasgow City Council suggested that some of its concerns about the bill related to process, rather than to the service that is delivered at the end. It indicated that the resources that are available will be tied up in processing orders and will not be used to deliver the service to prevent or correct offending behaviour. Do you have similar concerns? In your written evidence, you refer to a likely increase in the work load of the antisocial behaviour task force. Is that linked to the process or to provision of the service?

Matt Costello: It is linked more to provision of the service. I envisage that there will be an increase in demand for the service. The necessary processes are very much in place. Our procedures are tried and tested and over the best part of three years they have proven to be successful. Links

have been established with a number of relevant agencies to enable us to tackle problems of antisocial behaviour and to make appropriate referrals. The introduction of antisocial behaviour orders for under-16s will lead to an increase in case load. We are also looking to develop more community-based and neighbourhood compacts, which are likely in many areas to lead to increased reporting of local problems and a bigger work load.

Mr Welsh: The discretionary power to set up noise nuisance services is of concern to you. Why? How will you use the powers that the bill provides?

Matt Costello: We are examining the issue corporately. Our environmental services staff may take on the powers to which you refer. I am concerned about that aspect of the bill because local authorities already have many powers relating to professional witnesses, under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Officers of the council—my staff—can witness behaviour that is likely to cause fear, alarm or distress. We already have powers that are used effectively to tackle antisocial behaviour, which in many cases involves loud domestic noise—for example, loud parties or large numbers of youths gathering in a particular locality. We have had good results in getting orders issued or resolving difficulties through intervention by the task force and raising people's awareness of the fact that they are causing a problem.

The existence of powers for professional witnesses may cause confusion among people who utilise a noise nuisance team, should the council choose to introduce one. I cannot say whether North Lanarkshire Council has decided to do that, as the issue has not yet been discussed at corporate level. I can come back to the committee later with a more detailed answer on corporate policy.

Mr Welsh: That would be appreciated. How would you use powers such as fixed-penalty notices to deal with environmental issues? Do you think that the proposals would have any benefits?

Matt Costello: We are looking to introduce an environmental model of neighbourhood wardens, who could utilise the power to issue fixed-penalty notices. I propose that the power be extended to housing officers or investigators who witness disturbances in properties and see breaches of antisocial behaviour orders or the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

The Convener: In your submission, you refer to the resources that are required to identify and to interact with private landlords. Do you welcome the powers that the bill provides for local authorities to register private landlords? Has North Lanarkshire Council put a price on the resources that will be required for that?

Matt Costello: We have not put a price on the proposals in the bill. Previously, the Executive asked us to cost the proposals in the document "Putting our communities first: A Strategy for tackling Anti-social Behaviour". We put a price on staffing levels for those proposals. Costs vary depending on the model that is implemented. Running a service for North Lanarkshire would cost between £70,000 and £250,000.

I support the proposal for a form of registration of private landlords. I hope that such registration will be made as simple as possible, so that landlords in local communities—who could contribute a great deal to antisocial behaviour strategies—can come on board and take part in good neighbour declarations. We want to make registration a positive step. Some landlords may see it as negative, but we must reverse that perception. We must show landlords that they are becoming part of the wider picture and have a bigger role to play.

The Convener: That brings us to the end of today's questions. Thank you for contributing to the scrutiny process. I am sorry that we overran before starting this evidence-taking session, but your evidence has been very useful.

I thank colleagues and members of the press and public for their attendance.

Meeting closed at 17:10.

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