LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 24 September 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

£5.00

CONTENTS

Tuesday 24 September 2002

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE
23rd Meeting 2002, Session 1

CONVENER

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
*Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD)
*Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
*Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)
Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
John Young (West of Scotland) (Con)

*attended

WITNESSES

Stephen Bermingham (Scottish Youth Parliament)
Simon Jaquet (YouthLink Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Ruth Cooper

ASSISTANT CLERK

Neil Stewart

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Local Government Committee

Tuesday 24 September 2002

(Afternoon)

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:05*]

Items in Private

The Deputy Convener (Dr Sylvia Jackson): I welcome everyone to this meeting of the Local Government Committee.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I am here as a substitute member in place of Iain Smith, who is away in Brighton this week.

The Deputy Convener: Do members agree to take items 4, 5 and 6 on our agenda in private? Item 4 is consideration of a draft report. Items 5 and 6 are consideration of proposals for the scrutiny of bills, including the identity of possible witnesses.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Subordinate Legislation

Local Government Pension Scheme (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/311)

The Deputy Convener: Item 2 on the agenda is consideration of subordinate legislation. The Local Government Pension Scheme (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2002 are a statutory instrument subject to the negative procedure. I am reliably informed that the regulations were sent to committee members on 28 August. No comments have been received. The Subordinate Legislation Committee's report on the regulations is included in the papers for today's meeting. That committee did not consider that the Parliament's attention needed to be drawn to the regulations. No motions to annul have been lodged and no other action can be taken. Do members agree that this committee has no recommendation to make?

Members *indicated agreement.*

"Renewing Local Democracy: The Next Steps"

The Deputy Convener: We are continuing to take evidence for phase 2 of our inquiry into renewing local democracy. Today we will hear from Simon Jaquet, the chief executive of YouthLink Scotland, and Stephen Bermingham, who will introduce himself.

Stephen Bermingham (Scottish Youth Parliament): I am the national co-ordinator for the Scottish youth parliament.

The Deputy Convener: We have received your written submissions. After you have made an introductory statement, we would like to ask you a few questions.

Simon Jaquet (YouthLink Scotland): Thank you for giving us an opportunity to give evidence at today's meeting. Both separately and together, we want to say that young people have a key role to play in renewing local democracy in Scotland. I will say something about the who, the why, the where and the how of that. I will pick up some of the points that I made in my written submission and add one or two extra ones. Stephen Bermingham will say something about the role of the Scottish youth parliament.

Who needs to be engaged in renewing local democracy? Our argument is that we need to start with young people, who are the cradle of actual and potential democracy. There are two reasons for starting with young people. First, they are the voters of tomorrow. Secondly, they are the citizens of today.

Why is local democracy important? I draw members' attention to the United Nations millennium declaration, which was produced and made available publicly in September 2000. The declaration reaffirms the United Nations' commitment to its values and identifies some action points.

The declaration is a useful starting point for our conceptual thinking about why young people should be involved in democracy. It highlights, for example, the importance of values such as freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility. Those key values flow through not just international relations but local democracy.

In my submission, I have outlined some of the situations in which we think local democracy is developed. I shall run through those briefly. The starting point has to be the family. It is important that democracy is cradled and nurtured in the family. We must promote parental involvement in local democracy so that young people are aware

of democracy from an early age because they see it in the home environment. Democracy is also nurtured among young people in schools, with the development of student and pupil councils. We would support moves to develop such councils in all schools. It is also important that citizenship is not simply a subject in the curriculum. Our colleagues south of the border have introduced citizenship as a topic in the curriculum, but we have managed to fight shy of that up here. We have a chance to make citizenship more real by making a connection between local communities and what happens outside schools and what happens in schools. For example, young people in schools could be introduced to the volunteering opportunities that are open to them outside school hours. The Government-supported young people's volunteering scheme, millennium volunteers, might have a specific role in developing that.

I turn to young people in the community— outside the formal structures of schools and colleges—and the way in which democracy can be nurtured there. It is worth noting that 660,000 young people are regularly involved in youth work. That is not as many young people as there are in schools, but it is not far off. There is a real possibility for young people to engage in democratic debate and processes through their involvement in voluntary youth work. We would support cross-sectoral youth work partnerships as a way of developing that kind of involvement.

At a local level, it is important that the voluntary and statutory sectors work together to provide services to young people. The promotion of volunteering in the community is also important. The Scottish household survey of 2000 indicated that a quarter of young people aged 16 to 24 had volunteered in the past year—about 138,000 young people. Therefore, volunteering is not alien to young people; it is something that they do. We tend to have a stereotypical view that volunteering involves mainly the blue rinse brigade—or however we choose to caricature such people. However, young people are engaged in volunteering. Government initiatives such as the active communities strategy also promote volunteering.

The development of youth forums and youth councils is important, and we support their creation in every local authority area. Many areas have them already. I was recently in discussion with the City of Edinburgh Council's youth services committee, which is considering developing a 10-year youth strategy for Edinburgh. The committee has an interesting model for involving young people, councillors, council officials and officials from other bits of the public sector, such as the health service and the police. We commend that model to the committee.

A tangible thing that could happen to support community-based local democratic involvement of young people would be for local authorities to provide support for the Scottish youth parliament. Many authorities already do that, but we could up the ante a bit by providing further tangible support, resources and advice.

In the workplace, we can nurture democracy among young people if we begin to engage in debates with employers that permit not only older people, such as councillors, but younger people, who may be involved in youth councils, to be released from work duties and so on.

We would support the creation of a national youth policy to inform our thinking about young people and their involvement in more formal democratic structures across the board. Local youth strategies would flow from that development. I have mentioned the one that is being discussed by the City of Edinburgh Council, and there are many others. We would support the reduction of the minimum age for council membership from 21 to 18. We enter a plea that young people be seen as an important group when local authorities consult their constituents and stakeholder groups under the new community planning legislation.

Three organisations work together and are co-located at the west end. They are: YouthLink Scotland, which is the national agency that supports youth work; the Scottish youth parliament, which gives young people a voice; and the Young Scot organisation, which is the national youth information agency. We work together already and we would be happy to work with the committee to offer resources to assist the process of local democratic renewal.

14:15

Stephen Bermingham: The key thing in promoting local democracy is to allow young people, from the age of eight, nine or 10, to take an interest in issues that affect them locally. We should give them responsibility for issues such as promoting their right to safe play. There are good examples of young people engaging locally. It is all about building the capacity for young people to take an interest in local issues and local systems of democracy.

Another key issue that the members of the Scottish youth parliament have raised with us is consistency among councils. Some councils are very supportive of the work that the youth parliament does and support young people by attending events, but other councils are not so supportive. I would like there to be a service level agreement for council areas so that all members of the youth parliament receive the same level of

support. There are 228 members of the youth parliament and we do not pay their expenses. We do not have funding to support them—that is dependent on their local councils. Funding from councils is a bit ad hoc. In some areas, the members get good support, but in other areas they do not. I would like a commitment from all councils to make support consistent.

We have to consider the young people whom we want to get involved. We have to appreciate the fact that young people come from different backgrounds and the fact that different levels of support are available to them. We have to bear in mind the fact that some young people will need a lot more support and resources to take part in local democratic systems than will others. Some young people will need hardly any support, because they are self-motivated.

We would like to lower the age at which young people can vote, especially in local elections, to increase the number of young people aged 16 to 25 who take part. We believe that 16-year-olds should have the vote. We also think that citizenship and local democracy should form part of the curriculum from primary 7; such subjects should start not in third year at high school, but at primary school.

One interesting project that we have been piloting involves members of the Scottish youth parliament and MSPs and councillors holding joint surgeries. I know that there is a particularly successful pilot in Hamilton North and Bellshill. The local MSP is Michael McMahon and he holds a joint surgery with one of our members. As a result of that, our member was approached by young people who wanted to get additional provision for a skate park in their area. They are now working together to achieve that and I understand that they have some funding already. We would certainly encourage such surgeries but, despite the successes, some councils have blocked them, saying that they are undemocratic because they represent only one political party. We were outraged by that. Joint surgeries are a good, tangible way of making democratic systems more accessible to young people.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you very much. We certainly take on board what you said about joint surgeries, because they sound like a very good idea. I am sure that when more MSPs know about the pilots, they will have a go.

I want to start by asking you about citizenship, which I am particularly interested in. You mentioned how citizenship has been incorporated into the curriculum, but you also said that it has been advanced through the community. It is okay to engage in what is happening, but should citizenship education include more underlying principles about how we work together? Do you have any ideas about how the ethos in a school—how we work together—might extend into the community more widely, when we work as volunteers or with various groups? Have you seen the recent paper on citizenship education? Should such education be extended in any way?

Stephen Bermingham: A lot of the publications on citizenship that I have seen are quite abstract, which can be off-putting for young people. The main way to combat that is not to call citizenship "citizenship", but to use concrete examples of how people can be active or good citizens and move away from the conceptual, abstract stuff that academics want to speak about. A lot of the answer is in the language that we use and how we get the idea across to young people.

Simon Jaquet: Citizenship is about what we do, not what we say. The difficulty with teaching it in schools is that it can often be relegated to an academic discipline, where it becomes about the essay that a pupil writes or the discussion that they have rather than how they behave.

We could do worse than to adopt the values that are outlined briefly in the United Nations millennium declaration. Those values go to the heart of the democratic process. I urge the committee to read that document. The values are not new—they do not include any principles that are strange to us—but their encapsulation in that relatively brief format is somehow powerful. I found that when I read it.

On bringing schools and communities together, there is an issue about the status that community-based work is accorded in schools. Sadly, out-of-school activities are all too often accorded a lower status. There may be a number of reasons for that. The reality is that young people are in school for 20 per cent of their week—or whatever percentage it is—and the remaining larger percentage is spent in the community and the family. We must take account of that.

We would support practical activities that involve people in coming into schools and providing tangible opportunities. For example, one could imagine a local youth organisation coming into schools to explain its work, the opportunities for young people to take advantage of the services that it offers in the community and the volunteering opportunities for older young people in junior youth clubs. By bringing that information together in the school, it becomes available to the widest population of young people and becomes a bit more real for them than if they had simply read about it in a textbook.

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank you very much for your written submission. It is excellent.

On participation in democratic activities, it is

interesting that the lowest percentage in the National Youth Agency research mentioned in your submission is for the proportion of young people who had written to an MSP or councillor. Is that because young people do not feel that mainstream politicians will respond to their issues?

Simon Jaquet: That is the reality. The detailed numerical estimations vary, but the number of young people who are registered to vote and the number of young people who actually vote are on the decline.

Over the past couple of days, I have spoken to colleagues who are councillors. The theme that comes through consistently when we consider the demographics of councillors is that they are, by and large, 50 and over. There are exceptions to that, but if we were to line up all the councillors in Scotland in one large room, by and large they would be grey haired and there would probably be more men than women.

Think yourself into the eyes, ears and thoughts of a young person who sees that. It gives a clear message. You ask whether young people want to write to their MSP or local councillor. Faced with such a graphic picture, a young person's natural reaction is to think, "There is nobody there who looks like me and who looks as though they might understand me or be sympathetic to me." I am caricaturing, but you can understand why young people might be reluctant to approach elected representatives.

Stephen Bermingham: Young people feel a lot more comfortable speaking to other young people. I have seen many examples of the effectiveness of peer education. The same goes for local councillors. The value of the joint surgeries is that they engage young people at an earlier age, try to counter the democratic deficit among that group, try to get them on board and, in the longer term, build the potential for them to take an interest for the rest of their lives.

Mr Harding: You do not think that the problem is that young people have a limited understanding of the democratic process at national and local level.

Stephen Bermingham: It could well be, but it is the responsibility of the state to make young people aware of the different systems.

Mr Harding: The committee is finding it extremely difficult to find out exactly why young people are not interested in the established forms of democracy. Why are young people not voting?

Stephen Bermingham: They feel that politics is often out of touch with the issues that are important to them. They feel that the people whom they might be voting for are much of a muchness—they find it hard to distinguish

between the parties—and they do not see what effect voting will have on their lives.

Simon Jaquet: There is also an issue to do with tolerance of time scales: the younger you are, the quicker you want action. As we get older, we tolerate longer time scales between, for example, sending something in and getting a result. To put it crudely, it may be to do with quick wins. Young people want to see something happening. As we try to promote and develop democracy for young people, if the results of their campaigning, lobbying, complaining or involvement could be seen quickly, that could be capitalised on.

Stephen spoke about a skateboard park. Before, there was no park and no prospect of getting one, but now young people can see that there are moves afoot and that resources have been released. That is the kind of thing that engenders further involvement.

Mr Harding: I have asked the same question of young people—my son's friends and my daughter's friends, for example—and the most common answer is that politicians do nothing for them.

Stephen Bermingham: Young people have to see the impact of their votes and see what their local politicians are doing for them. If they could see that, they would be encouraged to vote. In the Shetland Islands, among voters between 18 and 25 at the election, our member got more votes than the person who became the MSP.

The Deputy Convener: That is brilliant.

Robert Brown: I must tell Tavish Scott about that.

I want to follow up on the issue that Keith Harding raised, because I did not think the answer gave the full story. Young people have always questioned institutions—we have seen the decline of the Scouts, the Boys Brigade, youth clubs, religious organisations and so on—but what has changed in recent years that has led almost to a crisis in democratic legitimacy among young people?

Simon Jaquet: I draw members' attention to the quotes on the first page of our submission. Every generation says that it is facing a major crisis among its young people—whether they be mods and rockers, punks or whatever. We revisit the question every generation. That is not to say that we are at exactly the same point as previous generations. I would sound a word of caution. Talk of crisis is the natural reaction of the older generation towards the younger generation—if that was not the reaction, there would probably be something wrong.

Some things have changed. The notion of community has changed. It is not that communities

of interest did not exist before, but we now have the idea of a community of interest on the environment, for example, as opposed to the local community. If we go back two or three generations, the community that young people grew up in was distinctly their own local community. They went to school and probably worked within a fairly tight geographical area. That has changed because people have greater mobility now. A lot of things are up in the air, and there are many more variables.

When people have fewer specific connections to their local communities, it is more difficult for them to understand the local ward, the local councillor or the MSP. Underlying all this discussion is the idea of renewing communities.

Stephen Bermingham: To be honest, I do not really know the answer to the question. It may be something to do with politicians. Young people do not feel represented in the political structures. Why should people vote for something in which they will not be represented? That may be a common feeling.

Simon Jaquet: Reference was made to the importance of understanding the processes. We have downplayed slightly the importance of formal civics education but, like everyone else in society, young people need to understand how things work. If they do not, they will find themselves in the default position of thinking that things happen and no one takes them into account. Someone will make decisions about education in Edinburgh and about roads, but if no one engages in that process, the quality of decision making drops. Like everyone else, young people need to be educated about the fact that if they opt out, things will continue to happen, but they will have less control over the process.

14:30

Robert Brown: My next question relates to the youth parliament. I do not know as much about it as I should, but I have spoken to some of its representatives from Glasgow. I got the impression that support from the central group was patchy and that there were big gaps before information appeared. More important, the members of the youth parliament seem to have emerged through talent spotting rather than through formal structures, such as youth groups. I say that as comment rather than as criticism. How can we move beyond the situation in which a couple of hundred people participate in the youth parliament after having been spotted? How can we root the youth parliament in a broader range of people who are interested in that kind of thing? How do we build the constituency of young people who may be interested in politics in the wider sense and who may in due course become councillors?

Stephen Bermingham: The answer to that question is simple. People should be paid. We work with the 14-25 age group. People aged between 18 and 25 have many demands in their lives. They might be single parents, Travellers, members of ethnic minorities or people who work long hours. At the moment we ask them to give up their time for free.

Robert Brown: My question was not just about the Scottish youth parliament. I was talking about the wider structure in which that parliament would be rooted and from which it would draw inspiration. There should be a mechanism for reporting back.

Stephen Bermingham: We have local co-ordinators who work in each council. I said earlier that there should be consistency among councils. All young people should receive the same level of support. Arrangements should not be ad hoc and should not depend on individual workers.

Robert Brown: Does the youth parliament report back to the Local Government Committee or to the Scottish Parliament generally about where problems exist, what support is needed and who the offenders are?

Stephen Bermingham: We would welcome the opportunity to do that, if we thought that action would be taken.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I want to pick up on the point that was made about the need to involve disadvantaged groups—ethnic minorities, girls, women and single parents. Does YouthLink Scotland take positive action to encourage people from ethnic minorities, young girls and disabled people to become involved actively? Does the Scottish youth parliament have a special programme for doing that?

Stephen Bermingham: We have only two members of staff. However, last Friday I visited the Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance, which agreed to promote our work among asylum seekers and ethnic minorities in Glasgow through its team of outreach workers.

It might help if I say something about the membership of the youth parliament. There are 300 places in the parliament. There are 100 places for individual members, who nominate themselves. There are a further 100 places for constituency members; each constituency is represented by two or three members. Finally, there are 100 places for representatives of voluntary organisations, but those places have not all been taken up. Much of our work is about promoting involvement of voluntary organisations in the youth parliament. That will address social exclusion.

Ms White: Does YouthLink Scotland promote actively the involvement of disadvantaged groups in its work?

Simon Jaquet: Yes. We support youth work and work with young people in the voluntary and statutory sectors. Our voluntary sector membership includes organisations such as Fairbridge, which works to get young people from socially excluded backgrounds into employment, and Fast Forward, which works with young drug users. Our role is to provide support, co-ordination and information to such organisations.

There are more than 90,000 youth workers in Scotland—more than there are teachers. The vast majority of those youth workers, about 80,000, are volunteers who have day jobs, but who do things such as run the girl guides on a Tuesday, work in detached youth work in Drumchapel for three hours on a Saturday or whatever. We support people across a wide range of activities and we work with groups who are extremely excluded. For example, in Glasgow, youth services have developed a programme of outreach to young asylum seekers in an attempt to direct them to the appropriate local services such as housing and health. We support such work.

Ms White: I agree with what you said about the voting age being lowered to 16. I can also confirm what you said about young people not being interested in politics, having just come from University of Strathclyde's freshers fair, which Robert Brown was also at. I think that the biggest crowd was of people wanting to join an appreciation society for "The Simpsons".

We know that the age at which people can stand for election to councils will be lowered to 18. Do you think that lowering the voting age to 16 would encourage young people to get involved?

Stephen Bermingham: I think that that would send the message to young people that they are being taken seriously. At the moment, there seems to be a paradox: young people can join the Army and get married at 16 but cannot vote for their council until they are 18. It would not solve all the problems but it might encourage young people to engage more in politics.

Simon Jaquet: Such a change should be part of a package of measures. Other parts relate to education and to nurturing opportunities in the community and other structures. I would defer to the opinion of the youth parliament on the extent to which such a change would help.

Ms White: Last week, representatives of Angus Council talked to us about its youth congress, which has committees on subjects such as transport. Should all councils adopt that practice? I know that the City of Edinburgh Council has.

Simon Jaquet: Dumfries and Galloway Council has a youth strategy executive group and I am sure that there are other examples around the country.

It is worth seriously engaging young people as stakeholders in the local democratic process for a couple of reasons. The most obvious is that they are users of council services and there are few council services that they do not benefit from in some regard. Also, they are future voters and we should engage them at an early stage. If there can be structures through which they can become formally involved in the democratic process— whether sitting in committees, having an advisory function or whatever—we would support that. I suspect that research is required to build on what is available in Angus, Edinburgh, Dumfries and Galloway and elsewhere. Perhaps lessons can be drawn from existing schemes and applied nationally.

Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): I am interested in the idea of inviting young people to be external observers in council committees and so on. I know that it seems like a good idea but I wonder whether young people's stamina could cope with it.

Your submission does not refer to any of the mainstream political parties. Do they have a particular role to play in encouraging young people to become politically active and in helping them to become more involved in local democracy?

Simon Jaquet: There must be a role for the mainstream political parties, because they provide major routes of access into the political process, although I am not sure what the best mechanism for that is. A range of people in a community should be prepared to debate and to engage in discussion with young people about what politics is about. That needs to start at the home. That does not mean that children should get a tirade of party-political views, but we should be promoting discussion in schools and in community activities, so that young people can perhaps decide that they wish to join a political party.

I am not a member of a political party, but I hear from friends and colleagues that attendance at committee meetings or going along to some draughty community centre for lengthy procedural stuff is not the sort of thing that tends to make young people think, "Yup—politics is for me." In any event, there has to be room for involvement in political parties.

Elaine Thomson: Another major group that is important to a large number of people in employment is the trade unions. What role should they play in the democratic engagement of young people? Should they have one?

Simon Jaquet: Absolutely. I am not sure at what age one can join a trade union.

Stephen Bermingham: It is 18.

Simon Jaquet: The potential youth participation exists—it is not as if people must be 25 to get involved. I am not sure that I could give an informed view in response to that question, however, other than to support the notion. Perhaps that is a subject for debate by the youth parliament.

Stephen Bermingham: Many of our members who are between 14 and 18 are exploited in the workplace. They are paid less than the minimum wage and they have no contracts, no holiday pay and no sick pay. If there was a move for the unions to start working with that younger age group, I think that it would make a difference.

The Deputy Convener: I am intrigued by the question of where your work finishes and where political parties—if they provide the main avenue for becoming an MSP, MP or whatever—should take over. Would it be helpful for political parties to hold more open meetings that were aimed at younger people and their interests? Could that offer something of a transition between your work and more young people entering the political sphere?

Stephen Bermingham: The problem is partly about the structure of meetings. They must not be off-putting to young people. A meeting such as this might put off a 14 or 15-year-old. On the other hand, young people want to be taken seriously. They like the official, structured setting of formal meetings. We recently held our first meeting in the Parliament's debating chamber over a weekend, and a lot of folk commented that the level of debate was raised by the setting. There is a fine balance. We do not want to act in a tokenistic way and have balloons at the door, for example. At the same time, the setting has to be young person friendly. The young people have to feel that they are being taken seriously in the right setting for the discussion.

Simon Jaquet: From our experience, having the right resources in place to support the process is key. It is not outwith the bounds of possibility that a couple of young people could sit at a meeting like this and participate, but simply to hoick them off the street and put them there is probably unrealistic—as it would be for many adults.

Teachers, youth workers and others can play particular roles in supporting the process of getting young people involved in formal political parties, in standing for election or whatever. They can act as mentors, brokers or supporters. Training and preparation, for example, can be quite formal. If some young people are going to take part in the formal process of a council, they will need to develop their debating skills.

At the other end of the spectrum, those mentors can simply chum the young people along and be there as a pal and talk to them once they have come out of the meeting room. Adults have a critical role as intermediaries. There will perhaps be plenty of young people who do not require that, but there will be many, particularly from excluded groups, who will. As a point of principle we may say that we wish to involve young black and ethnic minority people, people from disabled groups and so on, and that adults would have a role in assisting with that.

14:45

Ms White: I want to ask a question about something that has always bugged me and I would like your opinion on the matter. Could the media do more to heighten awareness not only of young people's involvement in politics, but of the many good things that they do? Could the media do that instead of highlighting the small minority who cause bother? It grates on young people that they are lumped together as one.

Stephen Bermingham: Absolutely. That is a pertinent theme and it is an issue with most of the young people with whom I work. Many of them are trying to do positive things and they feel that their portrayal in the media is particularly negative. There was an interesting incident during our recent meeting at the Parliament. A few folk from the media watched the proceedings, at which Jack McConnell was present. However, when he left, so did all the media. One of the young girls at the meeting said that if we started vandalising and smoking cannabis, the media would come back. As it was, we were having a constructive debate and the media were not interested in that. I agree with what you said about the media.

Simon Jaquet: I agree with what Stephen said. One of our campaigning issues is to get positive coverage in the media. I have an example from a different sector of how the situation often perhaps feels to the general public.

I am on a committee that is considering licensing laws in Scotland. One of our visits was to the police late on a Saturday night in Glasgow to look at public order issues. We were in the closed-circuit television control rooms. Prior to going in there, however, we were shown an edited video of CCTV clips from Sauchiehall Street. The way the video was edited meant that we saw incident after incident, which made us think that the streets of Glasgow were a terrible place to be at two o'clock on a Saturday morning. We then went into the booth to look at live images from the cameras. There were about twelve cameras and twelve screens. However, the live images were boring because nothing was happening.

The edited video is similar to the way that the media portrays young people. The media get their hands on incidents and bundles them together, which creates a focused image for the general public that makes them think that all young people commit crime, take drugs and are involved in public disorder. That feeds a vicious circle that makes the public reluctant to go out on to the streets because they feel that they will get mugged, or that a mad young person will molest them. Clearly, I am caricaturing, but there is little interaction on the streets between young people and adults because adults fear how they might be responded to. We need to do what we can to reverse such images of young people, particularly within the media.

The Deputy Convener: I have one other matter to ask about. You said that volunteering could be the main route for young people to get involved in the community. There are other routes such as undertaking work experience while at school. Can communities generally be more receptive; can they do more to welcome young people?

Simon Jaquet: Do you mean in the volunteering context?

The Deputy Convener: I mean generally to get young people involved in activities.

Simon Jaquet: I think that they can. An organisation that I used to work for was involved in promoting young people's volunteering. We discovered that if you put in place the right support—which perhaps goes back to the issue of the roles that adults can play—young people will give huge amounts of time to constructive activities that benefit the community and society rather than the individual.

There is often a need, however, to overcome barriers and to provide links into organisations whose doors young people would not usually go through. They need people to accompany them in such situations. The barriers include the word "volunteering", which is not a good word for many young people. If young people on George IV Bridge, for example, were asked whether they would like to be a volunteer, they would immediately think of a body such as the Women's Royal Voluntary Service. I mean no disrespect to the WRVS, but volunteering suggests a particular stereotype.

Planned succession is the key. That is as true for councils as it is for other organisations. If we want to continue to have life in the organisations within our democratic structures, we need new generations to come in. We need seriously to address what needs to be put in place now to ensure that we have people involved in a generation's time.

The Deputy Convener: Finally, I have a question on a point that Robert Brown made about links with the Parliament and feedback. There is also the matter of a link with local authorities and what they could be doing. Stephen Bermingham referred to funding. It would be useful to us—in terms of listing a few action points—if you could add to the information that you have given us.

Simon Jaquet: I am happy to do that.

The Deputy Convener: That would be great. I thank Simon and Stephen for their interesting comments and for their time.

Simon Jaquet: Thank you. I wish the committee well in its deliberations.

14:49
Meeting continued in private until 15:28.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, 375 High Street, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Friday 4 October 2002

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY EDITIONS

Single copies: £5
Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

Single copies: £3.75
Special issue price: £5
Annual subscriptions: £150.00

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75
Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.