

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 8 October 2002
(*Morning*)

Session 1

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE 25th Meeting 2002, Session 1

CONVENER

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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)

Angus MacKay (Edinburgh South) (Lab)

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con)

*attended

WITNESSES

Councillor David Alston (Highland Council)

Mike Baughan (Learning and Teaching Scotland)

Colin McAndrew (Learning and Teaching Scotland)

Arthur McCourt (Highland Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Ruth Cooper

ASSISTANT CLERK

Neil Stewart

LOCATION

Highland Council Headquarters, Inverness

Scottish Parliament

Local Government Committee

Tuesday 8 October 2002

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:06*]

The Convener (Trish Godman): Okay, comrades, let us start. First, I thank everyone for coming this morning. It is interesting to see so many people attending the committee meeting. I suspect that they have come because this morning's discussion is about local government and renewing local democracy. It is heart-warming for committee members to see so many people here. Perhaps we will have a chance to speak to them individually after the committee meeting is over.

I have a couple of housekeeping comments to make for those of us from Edinburgh. Members do not have to press the button on the microphone, which will come on automatically. Also, would everyone please switch off their mobile phones? I love saying that, because I hate mobile phones.

Items in Private

The Convener: Does the committee agree to take agenda items 3, 4, 5 and 6 in private this morning? Item 3 is consideration of the budget process, including the identity of potential witnesses. In items 4, 5 and 6, we will be considering proposals for the scrutiny of bills, again including the identity of possible witnesses. I know that that is a significant number of items to take in private, but members will understand the reasons for it. Do I have the committee's agreement on that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

"Renewing Local Democracy: The Next Steps"

The Convener: We now turn to phase 2 of the renewing local democracy inquiry. We welcome representatives from Highland Council. Councillor David Alston is the chairman of the renewing democracy and community planning select committee. Arthur McCourt is the council's chief executive. I welcome you both.

I believe that Arthur McCourt will lead off. The drill is that, after you have spoken to us for a few minutes, I will open up the meeting for members to ask questions.

Arthur McCourt (Highland Council): Thank you, convener. We have been asked to focus on widening access to council membership, particularly among young people, and on the provision of support services for councillors.

Our written submission focuses on three things: first, Highland youth voice; secondly, working with communities, particularly through our renewing democracy and community planning select committee, of which Councillor Alston is the chair; and thirdly, an overview of the kind of support services that we provide for councillors.

Everything that we have said in our submission and everything that I will say today is governed in large measure by the geography of the Highlands. We have to deal with long distances. We have many small communities, as well as a city. We have communities that are particularly active, with high community participation and relatively high voter turnout. Those factors form the back-cloth to what we do and to what we have said in our submission.

The approach that we have taken is to try to use information and communications technology to facilitate engagement with the council and to support members in their role as councillors. We do not envisage that ICT will replace the normal face-to-face contact of political discourse and community involvement. However, ICT can support that process and help it to work much more effectively than it otherwise would in an area with geography such as ours.

I will not repeat what we have said in our written submission. However, I would like to do a wee advert for youth voice, the second elections for which are taking place this week. Many of those elections are taking place online. We expect very high turnout—in some schools, it will be up to 90 per cent. The average turnout will probably be between 60 and 65 per cent.

One of the features of the youth voice election is that it is an interesting experiment in online

democracy, assisted by Napier University. The Highland youth voice website is perhaps unique in providing young people with an opportunity to examine manifestos, to debate with other voters and those who are standing for election, and to cast their vote online.

It is important that youth voice should influence the council and Government on issues that are on its agenda. It should not be marginalised by being given a small budget or by being made a general consultee. Youth voice can be a powerful voice for youth. The agenda that it has determined for itself—on drugs, sexuality and transport—is central to the interests of young people. We are trying to bring that into the main stream of politics and local government in the Highlands. It is for young people to judge how successful we have been at doing that. We like to think that we are making serious efforts, but time will tell. This is not a quick fix—we cannot engage young people in one or two years. It is an intergenerational project, the benefits of which we will see when the young people involved become adult voters.

The council's priority is to work with communities, primarily through the renewing democracy and community planning select committee, which is chaired by Councillor Alston. We would like to emphasise four strands; the committee may want to push us further on those.

We see community councils as being at the centre of our work with communities. There are 150 community councils in Highland, significantly more than in any other council area. We are attempting to encourage greater voter participation, through postal ballots. We are also trying to make life easier for community councils, which work on a voluntary basis, by encouraging and assisting them to use personal computers to do their business and to contact the council.

Consultation on service planning is central to the council's approach. Consultation is always messy, and we understand that we never get consultations entirely right. However, the issue is one of principle. In the long term, it is well worth the mess to embed into local government services the principle of consulting with communities and users about policies and changes to services. Time will tell whether we have got that right, but it appears from our annual performance survey that we have higher levels of satisfaction than many other councils do. As one would expect from that, we have much higher levels of community participation.

10:15

I am conscious of the nature of the audience behind me, so I will be careful about what I say on support for elected members. We have developed

a useful infrastructure of ICT support for elected members, which is a response to the geography of the area and the fact that the 80 members live in all parts of the Highlands. However, the potential of ICT has yet to be realised. Elected members' use of ICT is helpful, but limited—I suspect that that situation might be the same among MSPs. The situation is not surprising given our members' age profile and the fact that they represent a cross-section of society.

There is a catch-22 situation. Training and familiarity with ICT can remedy some issues, but elected representatives are markedly reluctant to engage in training and development. We have not found answers to that. We have tried to provide training and access to training facilities, but it is not easy for elected representatives to participate in training. ICT is one area in which we have a lot of work to do. We have made significantly less progress with ICT than we have with Highland youth voice or working with committees.

The Convener: I ask David Alston whether he wants to say anything.

Councillor David Alston (Highland Council): I will respond to questions.

The Convener: I will kick off the questions. One of our aims in our inquiry on renewing local democracy is to consider diversity, which involves encouraging young people to become interested in politics. Do you have initiatives where, for example, young people follow a councillor for a week or find out about day-to-day council work and what goes on in committees?

Arthur McCourt: A member of Highland youth voice shadowed the convener of Highland Council for a week. That was a salutary experience for them both. With the health service, we have a joint committee on children and young people, which includes young people's representatives. We also have pupil councils in schools, which give pupils an active role in dealing with issues of the day-to-day life of the school. However, to answer the question, we do not have a concerted programme.

The Convener: Will anyone from the Highland youth voice be at this afternoon's participation event?

Arthur McCourt: I am sorry; I do not know, but I can find out.

The Convener: I just wondered. We will find out this afternoon.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I am interested in Arthur McCourt's comparison of the "youth parliamentarians"—which is the phrase in the submission—to community councils. You mentioned a moment ago that Highland youth voice was not marginalised by giving it a budget. Will you say a little more about how Highland

youth voice interfaces with the everyday work of the council? What is the comparison to community councils, which, I guess, you are also trying to empower?

Arthur McCourt: I will answer the question about marginalising. Perhaps Councillor Alston will answer the second part. My comment was not that giving people a budget marginalises them, but that, in relation to young folk, budgets tend to be small and are not mainstreamed, which means that the impact on mainstream services of providing a budget for, let us say, the youth parliament is relatively small. In some ways, that issue is a bit of a diversion from the main issue of engaging young people in the wider concerns that they see as relevant.

With regard to our mainstream work, on a number of occasions, the council has had presentations from young people on issues such as drugs, alcohol and transport. Indeed, at our council meeting on Thursday, the focus will be on drugs and alcohol. I think that the youth parliament has played a large part in bringing that up our agenda in the Highlands. We would not have realised the importance of the matter for young people unless the youth parliament had told us that that was the key issue.

We have learned a lot from the approach that young people have taken to dealing with drugs and alcohol. The youth parliament has developed an advertising campaign and leaflets aimed at young people, which we would like to think influence their behaviour in relation to drugs and alcohol.

Councillor Alston: Clearly, the young people are working with a budget and the advertising campaign involved their making decisions about how to apply a budget.

The pupil councils in schools will be important for us. At least two members on Highland Council have been experimenting by ensuring that small budgets are available to the pupil councils in primary schools in their wards. We will continue to develop our thinking and practice in that regard. Through the joint committee on children and young people, we have been looking at the experience of Porsgrunn in Norway, from where young people will visit us at the beginning of December. One of the key messages that we are picking up from there is that it is important for young people to be making decisions about spending money from an early age. Another is that the children have to see quickly the results of the money that they have spent. That is another reason why there are difficulties in involving young people, particularly younger young people, in larger issues that the council deals with. Often, the results of decisions in those areas are not seen for three or four years.

We are reviewing our funding of community councils. This year, we have focused on providing additional support to get them involved with communicating with the council using ICT. In the coming year, we will try to provide additional training and planning and will also review our general financial support for community councils.

As the chief executive has said, we value community councils highly. Many of our community councils are engaged in a surprising range of issues in their community and are finding ways of increasing their budgets. We are clear that they need to be supported. We are aware that, because community councils do not have corporate body status and, unlike parish councils, do not have exemption from VAT, they have problems with becoming involved in local democracy by doing things for themselves.

Some community councils have employed village officers. They can often access funds that we cannot and are able to direct the work more directly. However, I think that it is unacceptable for us to ask a non-incorporated body to take on employment responsibilities.

Dr Jackson: People in my constituency of Stirling have been working on development trusts and community future activities, which can help to overcome hurdles. Are you moving in that direction as well?

Councillor Alston: Yes. Different communities are considering various possibilities and we support different community councils in various ways. The difficulty is that we are often asking people to jump through additional hoops. Things would be easier for us if the community councils could do slightly more.

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): You mentioned the drug and alcohol policy that is going to committee this week. That is an example of something that Highland youth voice has influenced. Are there any other examples where changes have been made to the council's policies or services as a result of the Highland youth voice initiative?

Arthur McCourt: One of the issues that the council is pursuing with its partners is the European capital of culture initiative. Highland youth voice has been central to developing that bid and in presenting it to the independent advisory panel and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Highland youth voice has been a lot more influential than we have been in shaping the bid.

That is an example of our attempt to embed the principle that young people should be involved in almost everything that we do. That process is progressive. I cannot say that our transport policies have been significantly changed by the

issues that young people raise, but we are gradually moving towards ensuring that timetabling and the level of services, for example, meet young people's needs more. That is a gradual process of change rather than a big-bang change.

Iain Smith: How is Highland youth voice made up? Who can stand for election, for example? How are the elections conducted? You mentioned schools. Is that the only way in which the elections are conducted? Does someone have to be at school to stand? How representative is the initiative of young people in the Highland area?

Arthur McCourt: You are right to point to the fact that the franchise is solely with secondary school pupils. Every secondary school participates in electing 75 young people. The majority of schools do that online. In itself, that is a useful development function.

If they wish, pupils can participate in the online debates or the real debates that go on in schools prior to voting. Voting takes place this week, from Monday through to Thursday. Where the voting system is online, it is password protected and uses a unique identification number.

The youth parliament will meet in November for the first time. Over a full weekend, it will debate its agenda for the next term.

Councillor Alston: The youth parliament also has an indirect effect on the members of Highland Council who attend it. It is a useful way of picking up some of the issues. There can be a feed into policy in that way.

Iain Smith: Highland youth voice is clearly a valuable school-based project, but do you have any initiatives for involving young people who have left school and might be in college or work?

Arthur McCourt: Our social inclusion programme is aimed at 14 to 25-year-olds. It is a thematic programme aimed particularly at excluded young people. We are working to bring excluded young people back into engagement with their communities and with education and preparation for work. That programme operates in five areas of Highland Council, including Inverness, Lochaber and Alness.

Of necessity, the number of young people with whom we are working is small. Working with young people who feel that they are excluded from the main stream of their community life is intensive. We have not made provision for including in Highland youth voice people who are involved in that programme. We have continued to develop Highland youth voice exclusively in schools.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Good morning. I thank the witnesses for their excellent

submission. I am interested in young people's involvement. Have you carried on that work with a similar idea for disabled people, women and ethnic minorities? Are such initiatives planned or on-going?

10:30

Arthur McCourt: We and our partners in the Highland well-being alliance—primarily the health services—support a range of organisations in the Highlands that aim to increase the involvement of clients, users and carers in influencing service delivery.

One example that I mention in our submission is Highland Community Care Forum, which provides advocacy and represents the interests of carers and clients. We have tended to focus on such representative bodies and advocacy, rather than on creating an equivalent to Highland youth voice for people who use community care services, for example. The forum is more useful and productive than a replication of Highland youth voice would be.

Ms White: Do you have figures on the make-up of youth voice? Is the male to female ratio 50:50?

Arthur McCourt: I do not have such figures to hand, but we can provide them for the committee.

Ms White: On a more practical note, have more young people become interested in standing for the council or for community councils because of youth voice?

Councillor Alston: It is too early to say whether young people will stand for Highland Council. Any information on community councils is anecdotal. One or two community councils have youth representatives, who were elected through schools. That has been aided by the democratic process in schools to elect representatives to youth voice. However, we have no systematic data on that.

Ms White: Three weeks ago, we heard evidence from Angus Council, which has an excellent initiative that is similar to Highland Council's. Young people in Angus are members of committees and their ideas about transport and other issues are proposed. Do you intend to push youth voice into that area? Do youth voice members' views have implications for transport policy, for example, rather than just for policies such as those on drugs?

Councillor Alston: The council has yet to debate that issue, which we are aware is important. As Mr McCourt said, we have concentrated on allowing the young people in youth voice to set their own agenda. We need to consider more closely the range of ways in which to feed what they say into our deliberations and

decision making. We have further debates to hold on that.

Arthur McCourt: I mentioned that Highland Council's joint committee—with the health service—on children and young people contains young people's representatives. We are grappling with the issue of having one, two or even three young people in a larger committee. When committee business is conducted in a formal way, it is sometimes difficult for young people to have their voice heard properly or to have the confidence to participate on equal terms with other committee members. We continue to struggle a wee bit with that issue.

Councillor Alston: I will give an example of a policy that has been influenced, which will pick up on some points that have been made. Our joint committee on children and young people is a smaller committee and is in some ways slightly less formal. Two young Traveller women gave a powerful presentation to the committee, which made a profound impact on its members and had a feed-through effect on council policies. That was a more effective way of doing things than asking them to take part in a full council meeting or a full meeting of the council's education, culture and sport committee.

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I believe that you said that there were 75 members of the youth parliament. Is there a limited number of places—a quota—for each school?

Arthur McCourt: Yes. I cannot remember what the quota is for each school, but there are a limited number of places.

Mr Harding: In your submission, you mentioned that you have a decentralised system of operational management and decision making. Does that cut down on bureaucracy?

Councillor Alston: It depends what you mean by bureaucracy. A centralised system makes it possible to reduce the number of meetings. Decentralisation and subsidiarity involve more meetings—for example, they involve the Scottish Parliament as well as the Westminster Parliament. The same applies to us. Our decentralised system does not cut down the number of meetings. Meetings and administration go on throughout the area. We believe that our system allows people to make decisions at a local level, which overcomes some of the problems that are caused by geography. If bureaucracy means unnecessary administration, there is no additional bureaucracy.

We must still examine issues such as the size of committees and how we operate them. Highland Council is the second council in Scotland to have undertaken a peer review. The report from the peer review has raised issues of that kind. Those

issues will be debated by the renewing democracy and community planning select committee and by the full council.

Mr Harding: Does the technological support for elected members that you mention in your submission make their job easier? Does it reduce councillors' work load and the number of hours of work?

Councillor Alston: It makes my job much easier, but that is because I am at ease using the technology. Different elected members would probably give you different answers. We should bear in mind the fact that technology represents only one way of supporting elected members; there have to be other ways. There must also be other ways of supporting other groups within the community. Our service point network, which some members use as a support base, is an important part of the support for elected members.

Mr Harding: Were elected members given any training in relation to new council structures and developments associated with the modernising agenda? Were they given specific advice on cabinet government and scrutiny functions, for example?

Arthur McCourt: The council is independent—it does not operate on the basis of a party group system. To that extent, scrutiny comes up in every committee and every council meeting. Independent members are always scrutinising the performance of the council's management. Every member has a chance to participate in decision taking. Some of the premises on which the Kerley report is based are difficult to apply in the Highlands, because the political system is quite different.

There is a need for greater clarity about what constitutes appropriate scrutiny and where the boundaries lie between scrutiny of the performance and delivery of service, and involvement in the operational management of service. That is a progressive thing, which depends on individual members' understanding of where the boundaries lie.

Mr Harding: I understand that your committees have 40 members. Will you explain the rationale behind that figure, which seems rather large?

Arthur McCourt: The figure is actually 32, but the principle of your question still stands.

Mr Harding: You have cut it since you last gave evidence, when the figure was 40.

Arthur McCourt: We have had a review of committees and have cut the number of committees and the number of members on committees. I mentioned the council's independent politics. There is a fairly rational and persuasive argument that, if one tries to delegate matters to

committees—almost all our business is delegated to committees—and those committees are not part of a party political system in which a group structure obtains, it is important that there are sufficient members on each committee to carry the balance of the council so that any decisions that the committee takes will stick and there is not a constant referral of items by notice of amendment to the full council. If items are constantly referred, business will clog up. Large committees may be inconvenient for me as an administrator and manager, but the argument is persuasive. The proof of the pudding is that there are few notices of amendment to the full council. In general, members accept committees' decisions, as they reflect the broad thrust of what the council's membership wants to happen.

Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): How do you see your use of ICT developing? How important do your councillors perceive the use and development of ICT to be in delivering decentralised decision making and more local accountability? Is it the way forward? Your submission mentions a range of initiatives. Are people enthusiastically behind ICT?

Councillor Alston: We might have given a slightly misleading impression. We have been at pains to stress that not all members of the council or all community councils and community groups will want to use ICT to connect with the council, but we see results from those who use ICT. For individual members, ICT is perhaps important in that community councils and community groups can get in and about the council's business through the ICT links. Our website is rich in information about the council. It provides a route in. Through initiatives that are under way, the richness of that information will increase dramatically in the next 12 months or so. Members are aware of that and are enthusiastic about the opening up of democracy through opening up information.

Arthur McCourt: Our submission notes that we have been experimenting with videoconferencing in anticipation of the Local Government in Scotland Bill; however, I doubt whether videoconferencing will replace face-to-face political debate to any great extent. It is useful in supporting political debate by allowing people who cannot be at a meeting to participate in it or to give evidence, but I doubt whether the use of ICT or videoconferencing provides the right medium to replace face-to-face political debate.

The Convener: Before Elaine Thomson asks another question, I ask her to move her microphone, as members are finding it difficult to hear her.

Elaine Thomson: I apologise.

Videoconferencing has its uses—sometimes it is appropriate, but sometimes it is not. Does the lack of take-up by councillors of ICT and training and development reflect the fact that you serve a difficult geographic area in which people must travel long distances? Alternatively, does it have more to do with the section of the population from which councillors are often drawn? Does it relate to age, for example?

Councillor Alston: We have some enthusiastic older members who use ICT as much as the younger members do.

Elaine Thomson: I am fully in favour of silver surfers.

Councillor Alston: The issue is the nature of the learning process. Over time, more and more members will become aware, through other members' actions, of the possibilities that are created through the use of ICT. We do not have a political structure, so people who become members of the council do not learn the job by being told how to do it by a political group. People learn the job through informal contacts with other councillors, and it is through those informal contacts that people's interest will develop.

10:45

It is becoming apparent that the use of ICT makes us more effective as a campaigning council. For example, we are preparing comments on a scoping paper from the Cabinet Office strategy unit on the economics of genetically modified crops. Without ICT, I do not think that we would have known of the existence of that paper. ICT links allow us to get involved in Government business. All members of the Highland Council see the community leadership role as a vital part of the council's work.

Elaine Thomson: I am interested in finding out how training can be delivered most effectively to elected members. It is clear that you have difficulty with that issue, which the Scottish Parliament has considered in some detail. If you come up with any solutions, please let us know.

Dr Jackson: In addition to Local Government Committee meetings—obviously—I enjoy going to Public Petitions Committee meetings. At one of the Public Petitions Committee meetings that I attended, the committee spoke to crofters via a videoconference link to a crofting community. I was amazed by how good the link was—the technology did not seem to hinder the discussion, which was reasonably good. I understand that you have pilot videoconferencing schemes in five sites. Where are the sites? What meetings have already been covered by videoconferencing?

My second question is about young people. Last week, we heard from representatives of

Renfrewshire Council, who gave us exactly the same evidence that you have given. They said that the involvement of young people often requires an informal setting. Have you spoken to Renfrewshire Council? In what ways are you sharing best practice on the initiatives that you are taking? Are you learning about initiatives from elsewhere?

The Convener: You asked five questions, Sylvia.

Dr Jackson: Sorry, convener.

Arthur McCourt: I will respond to the questions about videoconferencing. Our five pilot sites are in Wick, Portree, Fort William, Dornoch and Inverness. Most of the meetings that have taken place have been management meetings, although other meetings have been held. For example, a planning officer from headquarters has participated in a meeting of the Skye area committee of members. That saved about a day and 220 miles of travel—that is a fairly significant saving. Videoconferencing is also convenient for meetings that I may hold with the Scottish Executive or other Highlands and Islands council officials. The facility is used fairly regularly on that basis, saving significant amounts of travel time and money. We have yet to experiment with political meetings—that is, formal council meetings. You will be aware that, at this stage, we can use videoconferencing only for informal working groups of members. However, the Local Government in Scotland Bill will remedy that situation by enabling us to use it for formal meetings.

Councillor Alston: I will expand on Arthur McCourt's answer. I have been present at council meetings at which reports have been made via videoconference and at informal meetings at which officials have reported by videoconference to a group of councillors. I have also taken part in meetings with voluntary sector organisations—councils for voluntary services—that are spread throughout the Highlands, for which videoconferencing has been useful. However, as the chief executive said, it is early days for us. In a way, that is the answer to Elaine Thomson's other questions. The point that was made about where we might learn from other experiences is useful, and we will pursue it. Our experience is limited, so we have not been sharing it a great deal.

Ms White: I want to go back to the consultation process. You mentioned that there are 150 community councils in Highland area. Consultation may be fraught and not always amicable, but it is important. You consulted community councils; have any of their ideas been taken on board by the Highland Council?

Councillor Alston: There are a range of issues on which we are consulting community councils. Some of that consultation is statutory consultation. Most community councils would see that their views are taken seriously in the planning process. In some cases, they can sway decisions one way or another, because they are one of the key ways for us to know what communities are feeling. We have developed a code of practice on consultation. We need to do more work to embed that in our procedures. Community councils can feel over-consulted at times and we are working to address that. Mr McCourt may wish to pick up specific examples.

Arthur McCourt: There is a clear role for community councils in influencing individual planning decisions. Community councils have a significant role in providing the voice of the community in determining what goes into the local plan. Community councils' views have a significant influence in the broad sweep of consultation. They provide us with the views of 150 organisations, many of which are elected—although elections do not take place to some community councils—and the broad sweep of consultation is influential if we want to change a policy, for example. I am trying desperately to think of a policy, but I cannot think of one—I will do so as the meeting proceeds. Community councils are important consultees. They are the focus of our consultation on shifts in policy and service level.

Ms White: I see that we all have difficulties with various groups and organisations, regardless of which part of the country we come from. You send your annual performance survey to 5,000 members of the public. Who are those 5,000 people? Are they just members of community councils or are they outwith community councils?

Councillor Alston: The survey was actually sent to 7,000 people this year; it was sent to 5,000 the year before. They are a randomly selected group. We test the returns against the demographic profile and the geographical spread of the Highlands so that we are clear that the returns are a genuinely representative sample. That is done thoroughly and we are confident that the survey is a robust way of gauging public views of our performance.

Elaine Thomson: I have a supplementary question on the survey of randomly selected people. Are the views that are expressed on the council, its services and the way in which they are provided in tune with public perceptions—which are sometimes unhelpful—or are they different?

Councillor Alston: If the consultation just comes back with what we know already, it is not worth doing. The important thing about it is that it highlights areas in which we can improve. We knew that there was widespread concern about

roads and pavements. That confirmed what we already knew.

The survey also made it clear that we needed to do more about the way in which we handled complaints, not necessarily just the outcome of the process. We needed to improve the way in which complaints were dealt with by the person who got the first contact. We knew that that was an issue, but the fact that it came out so strongly in the survey was useful additional information that helped to point us in the right direction for improvement.

The Convener: I think that we have exhausted the questions. I will say a few things to sum up.

You mentioned that consultation is a good thing in principle, but that sometimes community councils and other groups feel that they are over-consulted. That is certainly coming out in evidence.

There have been a couple of good examples of consultation. You gave the example of the young Traveller women who listened carefully and came up with ideas in an informal meeting with the joint committee on children and young people. That kind of consultation and listening is always helpful and productive.

This afternoon's civic participation event will be done in small groups. Last week, when people talked about consultation, they said that we consult but do not listen. There is a difference between consulting and listening, and not agreeing. It is that last wee bit that is the difficult part, as you will probably agree—I see that you are nodding your heads. It is that gap that worries me. We need to get back to people to say that we listened to what they had to say but that we could not do what they wanted for this reason, that we decided not to do it for that reason, or that we did a bit of it.

As well as going round the country listening to what the councils are saying, and taking written information from the councils, we in the Parliament do a lot of consulting. People may say that we consulted but did not listen. We will have to address how to fill that gap, so that the next time we consult a group, it gives the same amount of attention to the consultation as it did the first time.

Sylvia Jackson asked about contacting other councils. Although there is good practice around, we are failing to network and tell others when there is a good idea.

I thank the witnesses for coming. It has been very helpful and what has been said will be part of our deliberations. I also thank the audience for coming to listen this morning.

I welcome Mike Baughan who is the chief executive of Learning and Teaching Scotland, and

Colin McAndrew who is the principal curriculum officer of Learning and Teaching Scotland. You have been sitting watching the meeting so you know the drill. You may make some opening comments and then I will open it for questions from members.

Mike Baughan (Learning and Teaching Scotland): I begin by thanking the committee for the opportunity to give evidence. I will remind the committee who we are. Learning and Teaching Scotland is a non-departmental public body that is sponsored by the Scottish Executive. Our remit is to provide advice and support on all matters relating to the school curriculum for pupils between the ages of three and 18. The focus of our submission is our recent publication "Education for Citizenship in Scotland: A Paper for Discussion and Development". Committee members have been provided with copies of that document.

11:00

The document was published in July last year, following a six-month consultation exercise on a draft document. It has been endorsed by the Minister for Education and Young People, who has commended the view that is expressed in "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" to all schools and local authorities. She has further endorsed the paper as the basis for a national framework for education for citizenship for the age group from three to 18. The document is closely linked to the implementation of national priorities in education as part of the school improvement framework. It has contributed significantly to the current national debate on the purpose of education; we have seen that in the references to "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" in the submissions that have been sent to the Scottish Parliament and to the Scottish Executive.

The central idea in the paper is that young people should be enabled to develop a capability for active participation in political, social, economic and cultural life. We define that capability in four aspects: knowledge and understanding; skills and competencies; dispositions and values; and an enterprising and creative approach. The paper describes the opportunities and conditions for learning that schools, in partnership with their communities, should seek to provide.

In essence, the paper says that young people learn most about citizenship by being active citizens and doing things. We suggest that schools should model the kind of society in which active citizenship is encouraged, by providing all young people with opportunities to take responsibilities and exercise choice. That requires a specific type of ethos in a school or an early-years establishment—an ethos that is open, that

encourages participation and that recognises and pays more than lip service to the involvement of young people.

However, it is not sufficient to progress ideals without providing young people with the means to achieve goals. That challenge is being taken up readily by many schools. The work that we are undertaking in disseminating good practice gives us great cause for encouragement. We heard, for example, in the evidence that was just presented about the youth forums and youth summits that operate in different parts of the country, not just in the Highland region. I guess that those are a product of the early capabilities that are set out and practised from the earliest years of education—even in pre-school centres.

When we talk about knowledge and understanding, we set out an agenda. We hope that young people will leave school with knowledge of contemporary local and global issues, knowledge of their rights and awareness of the fact that with those rights come responsibilities. We hope that we provide them with the motivation to bring about change. They need knowledge of the workings of our democracy and democratic processes in local government, community councils, the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament. They need to understand how the decision-making processes in society operate and how they can use and participate in those processes. They need to understand the role of the media and the role of marketing. Finally—and most challenging—as well as recognising that they can influence what is happening in their local communities, young people must also recognise that they are part of a global community. They must see that the impacts on their lives are ripples that perhaps impact on global economies and on sustainability and environmental issues, which are close to young people's hearts. They need to recognise the interconnectedness of all those impacts, and how they as citizens in Scotland can make their voices heard and do something about issues.

We chose deliberately not to call "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" a paper on civics education. We are trying to move away from enhanced study of the constitution to having a real belief in young people. They have, and can develop, the skills and competencies to affect and be part of decision-making processes rather than just know in theory what may happen and may influence their lives. We need to develop core skills and competencies. We need to develop personal qualities in young people and we need to develop their self-esteem and confidence. Young people need to develop initiative, determination and the emotional maturity that allows them to engage in debate. They need to develop the feeling of being empowered. It is no good saying

to young people that they are empowered: they need to internalise that and to believe that it is the case in their school community.

The skills and competencies that we outline in the paper are not restricted solely to education for citizenship. They are among the skills that young people need to acquire in order to grow up as effective members of society; for example, they need to learn to earn a living. The skills that we describe are connected essentially with education for work, personal development and living a fulfilled life. In the paper we have tried not to isolate an aspect of the curriculum and to call it education for citizenship. We do not believe that citizenship is something that is learned in period 3 on a cold Tuesday morning; rather it is something that should imbue the ethos of a school and spill across into other areas of young people's learning.

We are setting out a very challenging agenda for schools. The council takes the view that each young person in Scotland is entitled to receive education for citizenship. That entitlement can be secured only through a combination of learning experiences that are reflected in the day-to-day life of a school. Those experiences should be manifested in cross-curricular activities and the school's engagement with the community. We say that citizenship education is part and parcel of the ethos of schools. The school should challenge young people and should make it clear in all its actions and activities that respect for others is part of the day-to-day life of youngsters in the school. The learning process in which youngsters are engaged should be active and should be influenced by the voice of youngsters.

The paper sets out a challenging role for teachers. If education for citizenship is to succeed, it must manifest itself in interactions within the classroom—the ways in which pedagogy takes place, and the ways in which teachers challenge pupils and make connections between what youngsters are learning in the classroom and the wider world. It must manifest itself in the relationships that exist in the classroom and in the conduct of day-to-day work in the school.

The paper presents us with a challenge—a challenge that has been welcomed broadly in the consultation process and by schools. It does not set out objectives that are unobtainable. There is evidence of good practice from up and down the country that demonstrates to others that this challenge can be met. If we do not rise to it—by we, I do not mean just teachers and educators, but society in general—our hopes and aspirations for a thriving democracy that touches all people in Scotland will not be achieved.

The Convener: This may be an admission on my part, but my grandson knows more about information and communications technology than I

know. That is not difficult, but he does. I suspect that young people are much more adept at using communications technology than many of the people in this room. If we use technology for voting and to increase communication, will young people be more interested in getting involved and voting?

Mike Baughan: I will make some comments and then hand over to my colleague Mr McAndrew, who can give some practical examples of the use of ICT to encourage young people to participate.

Provision of ICT and familiarity with its use will not be sufficient; there must be motivation to do something with it. You are right to say that ICT is a powerful motivating factor in the classroom. The evidence of our own eyes shows us how young people engage in text messaging—given the opportunity, they will communicate that way until the cows come home. The injunction that the convener gave at the start of the meeting to switch off mobile phones is one that is often heard in every classroom the length of the country.

ICT must have a purpose. Young people must believe that there is purpose in using technology—whether it is being used for voting or for expressing views. If young people believe that their views will not be listened to, or that their views are being sought tokenistically, ICT will not increase their involvement.

The concept of anytime-anywhere learning is now part and parcel of schools. In many schools, young people are used to videoconferencing, to communicating by phone, to communicating online and to using e-mail. They participate in the global community through the medium of e-mail. That in turn puts a huge responsibility on schools to ensure that young people are literate in the use of ICT. Young people have to understand use and abuse of, for example, the worldwide web. Young people might be researching a project and might go to sites on the web that purport to give information on the Holocaust, but many such sites source materials that are, to be quite frank, abhorrent and factually inaccurate. In teaching the use of ICT to promote involvement in a participatory democracy, one must first of all teach the grammar of ICT, if I may call it that. Young people have to know what a URL—uniform resource locator—means; they have to understand how to cross-reference, to sift, to discriminate, to analyse and to form judgments. The thrust of our paper is that education for citizenship is simply good education that teaches young people to think.

Mr McAndrew has substantial experience in the use of ICT to communicate.

Colin McAndrew (Learning and Teaching Scotland): First of all, I would like to thank my colleague for that comprehensive answer. The importance of ICT is in its use as a tool. A huge investment has been made in ICT throughout public services. In education, that was to an extent an act of faith—certainly in the early days. However, we are beginning to see the benefits. To begin with, we were thirled to the technology, but we are now looking much more closely at the applications and best use of the technology. The international teledemocracy centre at Napier University is doing groundbreaking work. I am sure that members are aware of the centre's activities—which include support for Highland youth voice.

Over the coming months and years, it will be interesting to follow dialogue youth, which is a flagship programme of Young Scot, and to see to what extent the convener's question is answered. Dialogue youth is heavily dependent on electronic communication, with young people putting their views on websites and working to an agenda that has not been predetermined but is their own. A lot is riding on that programme, which will be evaluated and monitored very closely.

Ms White: LTS's remit covers all aspects of education; citizenship is just a small part of the remit. I want to get that point right in my mind. Does LTS have in place methods to evaluate the effect that "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" will have on education?

11:15

Mike Baughan: Yes. We evaluated the interest that was taken in the draft document, which was out for consultation for seven months. It is fair to say that no other consultative document from LTS or its predecessor body, the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, has attracted so much interest from all community groups. The list of usual suspects responded to our consultations, which is to be expected. There were a considerable number of responses from young people, through Save the Children, which we commissioned to sample young people's views from up and down the country on the thrust of the paper. It was noticeable that young people welcomed the engagement in the consultation.

That research bodes well, but what happens now? Our programme of work for the years ahead has two aims. First, we aim to disseminate practice that works well in pre-school centres, primary schools and secondary schools and in interactions between youth groups and local authorities. Secondly, we aim to provide teachers with resource materials that can be used in the classroom. As part of the roll-out of good practice, we will continue to sample and survey and to work

with local authorities to discover how effective the paper has been in helping us to act on the principles that the paper outlines. We will also identify the specific resources that schools might need to help them proceed with the extremely ambitious agenda.

It would be ironic if a position paper on education for citizenship were not adapted as the result of the unfolding of the democratic process. That is why we deliberately chose the subtitle "A Paper for Discussion and Development". We want to send out the message that the paper is not set in tablets of stone and handed down from on high by a central body, but that it is a reflection of debate and dialogue throughout the country. The paper sets down a marker that much more needs to be done and that any action will be influenced by young people.

Ms White: I presume that the paper to which you refer is the one of which, according to your submission, 13,000 copies have been sent out. I thought that your role was to advise ministers and the Scottish Parliament on what may or may not be in the curriculum. Good citizenship is in the curriculum in England and Wales. Everyone has different ideas about whether it should be in the curriculum here, but I believe that your advice was that it should not be in the curriculum. You mention that you commissioned work from Save the Children and I assume that that body was one of the 13,000 recipients of the paper. Did you consider sending a copy of the paper to every school? Why was the paper not sent out to every school?

Mike Baughan: Copies were sent to every school. Schools fall into the category of the usual suspects that I mentioned earlier. Every pre-school organisation, primary school and secondary school in Scotland was provided with a consultation copy. Now, as a result of the distribution of the 13,000 copies, I think that every secondary school has a minimum of 10 copies and that primary schools have approximately five copies.

We have stated clearly our advice to the Scottish Executive on citizenship as part of the curriculum, which the minister has endorsed. Our advice is that education for citizenship should be central to, or part and parcel of, the curriculum in Scotland. We did not recommend that a specific proportion of time should be set aside for something that is called civics education or education for citizenship because we are afraid that that might marginalise education for citizenship into the old-fashioned civics education class, which focused on the acquisition of facts.

In the paper, we set out clearly the result of the consultation process, which is that it is not sufficient to give young people information alone.

If citizenship is to be internalised and young people are to be disposed to become active citizens, knowledge and understanding are critical.

I want to make it clear that education for citizenship is central to the Scottish curriculum. It should, however, be handled in a slightly different way. I should add that "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" is attracting interest in the United Kingdom, Europe and, internationally, in the United States and the far east. All of our sister curriculum bodies are engaged in similar work.

A recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development survey, which examined the initial launch of "Education for Citizenship in Scotland", sets out conclusively that the general international trend in education for citizenship is similar to the process that we have adopted in Scotland. In other words, it is a trend that has seen the move away from giving information to active involvement of young people.

Ms White: I have a follow-up question. The reason that I mentioned evaluation was to show the importance of the results.

Mike Baughan: Absolutely.

Ms White: We have heard about youth parliaments and youth councils in evidence from councils in Inverness, Angus and other parts of Scotland. Are those ideas contained in your paper or have councils picked up on them in another way?

Colin McAndrew: I want first to return to the correct emphasis that Ms White placed on evaluation. As one of the supporting instruments to help schools, early education centres and others to implement the paper, we have developed a series of audit tools, in conjunction with a group of four Scottish local authorities. The audit tools are designed to help practitioners get into the paper and reflect on their current practices. We want to help them to promote local developments. The audit materials are available in print form and online for schools to download. At first, we felt that they would be of more interest to the local authorities rather than to schools or centres, but in the short time since publication, demand throughout the country has been such that we are making them available to all schools in Scotland.

Ms White also asked about the extent to which the paper supports participation in decision-making processes. She asked whether it did that or simply reflected the best practice that is going on in Scotland, including in the Highland Council area. The paper does a mixture of both. A great deal of good work is going on throughout the country and one role of a national body is to disseminate such best practice.

A second important action that we have taken is to establish a citizenship network for the local authorities in Scotland. We have invited each local council to nominate one of its directorate or advisory staff to be a member of the network. That action represents recognition of the clear role that the national body has to play in supporting local authorities to implement solutions that are appropriate to their areas.

Iain Smith: Like my colleagues, I am often asked to speak to schools about politics. Those requests sometimes come through the Parliament's excellent education service and at others they come directly from primary and secondary schools.

In 17 years as a councillor and three years as a member of the Scottish Parliament, I have never been given any advice about what I should say at those events. However, I have been asked back, so I assume that I am not doing too badly. Does LTS have plans to support the visits to schools that elected members at all levels make? How do you support MSPs who want to help to encourage participation?

Mike Baughan: I am pleased to say that we are working with the Scottish Parliament to produce a young person's guide to the Scottish Parliament. The guide will be launched either this month or in November in the format of a video. It attempts to outline the work of the Scottish Parliament by dealing with matters such as elections, agendas and the remit of the Parliament. It is a handy tool that can be used at all levels in school education as a starter for debate. It does not pretend to be a lesson in itself; rather, it is a stimulus. MSPs might find it useful and could speak after appropriate sections of the video.

The motivation for that video came about two years ago when George Reid gave a presentation to a group of senior students in Edinburgh. From the questions that were asked afterwards, it was clear that the levels of knowledge among that articulate group of school students were mixed and we concluded that that was not acceptable. Along with the Parliament, we felt that, at this early point in the life of the Parliament, we had a responsibility to inform all young people in Scotland of the importance of the Parliament and the ways in which it affects their lives. We wanted to move away from simply giving information and, instead, to talk to young people on a much more personal level. We wanted to ensure that young people knew that the Parliament is relevant and meaningful to them and that they could influence its proceedings.

That was a rather laborious answer to the question but I wanted to focus on a specific initiative of the Scottish Parliament that we have been invited to support.

Iain Smith: We have heard about some councils' good practice in engaging with young people. Are there plans to expand the project that you are talking about to cover the operation of local authorities, which are also important?

Colin McAndrew: That will be an agenda item for the local authority network that we have recently established.

There is no single solution and various local authorities will adopt differing strategies. It would probably not be desirable for there to be a formula that local authorities can just plug into. Our role is to provide the policy leadership to legitimise good practice. Education for citizenship has been bought into by the education system and civic society in Scotland. Our task is now to ensure that in partnership we move forward with a consensual model.

Mr Harding: During its inquiry, the committee has heard a great deal about young people's lack of interest in politics and their failure to participate in local and national elections. What are your views on the reasons for that?

Mike Baughan: There is a paradox, in that young people are passionately interested in single issues, for example, pollution, the environment and other global issues—the youth membership of some activist groups such as Greenpeace is huge—but that interest is not demonstrated in their participation in local and national elections. One need only look at the figures.

I cannot give an explanation but I can make an observation. If education for citizenship is to be effective, we must develop evaluation measures that go beyond the performance indicators that we develop to measure political interest in schools. We should take account of the number of young people who offer themselves for election in their local communities and the number of young people who vote in local and national elections.

That will not happen overnight; it will take time. Politicians have a responsibility to connect with young people and to translate the work in which they engage so that young people can understand it and consider it relevant to the big single issues in which they engage. All the evidence suggests that, when appropriate approaches are made, it is not difficult to engage young people.

I cast my mind back to evidence that was given to the Parliament on the national debate on education. Highly articulate and committed young people gave passionate evidence and tried to affect the decision-making process in ways that they thought would improve education.

A dual responsibility exists. Schools, parents and those who work with young people have a responsibility to provide young people with the

skills and the dispositions that are required to engage in the process, and there is a concomitant responsibility on elected members to make every effort to translate their day-to-day work into terms that are meaningful to young people.

11:30

Mr Harding: Values and citizenship are a national priority in education. How are education services developing that priority? For example, what work are local development officers engaged in?

Colin McAndrew: It is fair to say that it is early days. A national priorities support team is working through Learning and Teaching Scotland and is remitted to support local authorities in developing their local proposals on the national priorities.

The programme for national priorities highlights several performance measures and quality indicators. In the first few months of the programme, people identified more easily with the quantitative measurables—the numbers and the boxes that could be ticked. The part of the national priorities website that is devoted to values and citizenship is interesting. The website says that a performance measure is under development. It would be wrong to rush into a crude measure. Effective practice should be determined through reflection on current good practice and on what our policy paper suggests is working well. It is early and cautious days.

Dr Jackson: I thank the witnesses for their submission. Last week, a question was asked about the difference between education for citizenship and civic education. You have answered that question nicely, for which I thank you.

Keith Harding talked about values and citizenship. Learning and Teaching Scotland's paper highlights pupils'

"respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society"

and refers to thoughtful and responsible participation. I take it from such comments that you link in with the national priority on values and citizenship, but you seem a bit hazy about how that will be realised in the curriculum, which relates to Sandra White's point about the amount of time in the curriculum. Civic education exists to some extent, but more might be provided. The other aspect is much more concerned with ethos and values. Will you say more about that? I am worried not so much about tick boxes as about the big picture of implementation in schools and the community in which children live. Are you examining any such work elsewhere and in Europe? I know of some work south of the border.

Mike Baughan: When we developed the draft for consultation, we took evidence from Professor Bernard Crick, who as the committee knows was influential in taking forward the education for citizenship initiative in England. We also did a literature search and attended a range of international conferences, where we heard presentations from curriculum bodies from other countries that were launching initiatives of this nature.

The steering group listened with a great deal of respect to what Professor Crick had to say. There is no doubt that what has been happening elsewhere in the world has had a significant impact on the paper that we have produced. However, we were producing a paper for discussion and development in the context of the Scottish curriculum. We were fortunate, first, that a considerable degree of flexibility is built into the Scottish curriculum that allows time for the knowledge and understanding components and the skill components of "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" to be taken forward.

Secondly, there were natural contexts within the curriculum, such as the five-to-14 social subjects curriculum, in which people in society was a mandatory subject for all youngsters. That lent itself to education for citizenship and dealt with many of the topics that we wanted to pursue. We were also aware of connections that could be made within the personal and social development curriculum; religious and moral education; the expressive arts curriculum; the maths curriculum—for example, problem solving; and the core skills that infused the curriculum. We addressed head-on the issue of the soft approach or the cop-out of education for citizenship meaning all things to all people—in other words, producing a discussion paper that set out principles that people would be likely to subscribe to but that would not necessarily be reflected by action on the ground. We developed further advice within "Education for Citizenship in Scotland", which showed how linkages could be made to the key subject areas that all young people take.

There was an interesting debate about choice. Modern studies is one of the most powerful vehicles for dealing with many of the knowledge components of education for citizenship. Committee members will be aware that modern studies is an option that can be taken after S2 in most schools in Scotland. A powerful argument was put forward that modern studies should not remain an option but should become mandatory. We had the supreme irony of education for citizenship, which deals with personal choice, decision making and self-responsibility, being counterpoised against the removal of choice. Most other subjects in the curriculum, apart from some key ones, have an element of choice after S2.

We needed to develop audit tools to satisfy ourselves that every youngster in Scotland would receive the entitlement that we set out in "Education for Citizenship in Scotland". We worked closely with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. We were aware that, because education for citizenship and values education are a national priority for education, they must feature in the local authority improvement plans. The work of the national priorities team, to which Colin McAndrew referred, is connected with supporting local authorities so that they can evaluate in their education improvement plans how they have responded to the five big national priorities in education.

The development of the battery of indicators, which are certainly not quantitative in the narrow sense, meant that we felt sufficiently reassured that "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" had a tough enough edge to take it beyond being platitudinous and aspirational to carrying hard teeth. As we evaluate "Education for Citizenship in Scotland", we will be able to demonstrate that schools are engaging with the agenda. Schools that are perhaps reluctant to engage with the agenda will see the benefits that have been opened up to pupils in schools where education for citizenship is pursued in the way that we suggest.

Dr Jackson: I do not think that you have tackled the issue of values. What do you see happening differently in schools? You are reticent about considering practice from elsewhere. In some places, attempts are being made to bring principles such as self-respect into the way of working in primary schools.

Mike Baughan: We have worked closely with the Gordon Cook Foundation in the area of values education. In two weeks' time, we will be represented at an international conference in Washington that will consider values in the context of education for citizenship. I maintain that the paper makes some explicit and hard points about respect for others and respect for self. However, values education must be part and parcel of the demonstrated ethos of a school. If it is not, we need to ask whose values are being taught. The values of the school community are collective values—values that parents, children and teachers would buy into. One would expect those to be articulated clearly in the aims of the school.

The point of rooting education for citizenship in the ethos of a school is that one has an expectation that young people will demonstrate the values that are being promoted. That raises issues of inclusion, discipline and the school's involvement with its community. It means having a set of touchstones against which the behaviour of young people can be measured. It means having

examples that allow young people to place values in a context.

I was a secondary school head teacher for more than 10 years. I knew that a value system operated in my school. A broad but sharp consensus existed in the parent and pupil communities. We were able to set out the expectations that we had of young people, who were expected to respond to and mirror certain values in their day-to-day work. Bullying and the exclusion of pupils through bullying were clearly unacceptable. There is a hard edge to the paper "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" as it relates to values.

Elaine Thomson: We have covered many of the issues about which I wanted to ask. In response to an earlier question from Iain Smith, you talked about the role of MSPs in communicating with young people. To a great extent, democratic decision making is delivered through political parties—Highland is an exception. All the members of the Local Government Committee are representatives of political parties. Do you see political parties as having a role in delivering the citizenship agenda? How do you envisage them participating in that?

Colin McAndrew: The short answer to Elaine Thomson's question is that of course political parties have a role in delivering the citizenship agenda, both nationally and at local level. MSPs, MPs, MEPs and local councillors can all contribute. I would like to focus on the role of local councillors. Picking up on the point that Iain Smith made, I think that it would be appropriate to invest in research into how many of the politicians who enter classrooms are equipped with the range of skills that they need to interact with young people. We need to find out what sort of support, such as training programmes, would be useful. A pack should be available.

Perhaps it would be best for politicians to enter the classroom not with a political agenda, but with no agenda. They may want to begin by listening to young people. Political parties also have a role to play at national level. I am sure that each of them is discussing the issue.

11:45

Mike Baughan: I pay tribute to politicians for the work that they have done with schools over many years—this is not a recent phenomenon. Politicians have helped to organise mock debates that coincide with national elections, for example. Some of the most passionate and spirited involvement of young people in democracy and decision making has occurred around the time of general elections, when the pupils themselves represent parties, stand for election, go on the

hustings and deliver impassioned speeches. That process can be assisted by the local candidate, provided that a level platform is given. I add that caveat, because schools are naturally nervous that they might leave themselves open to claims of giving preference or priority to a political party. The Modern Studies Association's guidance on organising mock elections in schools has been invaluable, and more and more schools are participating in such activities.

However, I repeat that such activity has tended to be associated with secondary schools. There is absolutely no reason why issues, especially local issues, cannot be explored and debated at the very earliest stage. Our paper tries to suggest that young people do not suddenly become citizens at 16 or at the statutory age of 18. We echo the United Nations charter in saying that, as all young people are citizens, they have a right—indeed, a duty—to participate in the sort of debate that, at a more senior level, is supported by so-called professional politicians.

I know that hundreds of teachers up and down the country have much to thank politicians for in giving up their time to address classes on particular topics or to participate in and support debate. Indeed, we would like to see much more of that.

As pupil councils grow in their power, we will see much more of that type of activity. I emphasise the phrase “in their power”. There is nothing worse than having a tokenistic pupil council that meets periodically and has no real influence over activities in school. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 lays a mandatory duty on head teachers to consult pupils on the school development plan, which itself goes to the heart of the educational experience that young people enjoy. As a result, we will see the development of much more active pupil councils and mechanisms for elections to those councils. Such an opportunity can be used to mirror the processes that happen outwith school in local, community council and Scottish Parliament elections.

Ms White: I want to follow up the questions that Sylvia Jackson and I asked about evaluation. I know that it is still early days. Nevertheless, we all want our kids—and indeed our adults—to be good citizens. Do you have a time scale for evaluation? When the evaluation maps, or whatever you want to call them, are returned, what do you evaluate them against? Are you trying to find out whether each school has picked up your ideas, whether less bullying is happening in a particular school or something else?

Mike Baughan: First of all, the paper itself sets out a framework against which evaluation can take place. As for time scales, we hope through the national priorities team to publish indicators during

the course of next year that local authorities can use to help them to report within the context of their improvement plan on how a particular priority is being addressed in schools throughout the authority area. Therefore, the time scale is quite short.

We have deliberately shied away from easy-to-crack, quantitative measures and are moving into the much more difficult area of evaluation and judgment. I stress again that that work will be independently evaluated by HMIE. When school inspections take place, it will be reasonable to expect that HMIE will ask questions on how education for citizenship manifests itself in the school. It will expect to see evidence on the ground of the types of activity that we have outlined under knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies and, most of all, opportunities for experience within the school.

Some very basic questions might be: how does the pupil council function? How many members does it have? How often does it meet? What sort of decisions does it make? Do the decisions relate solely to the provision of toilet rolls in the boys' toilet or do they relate to the curriculum itself? What sort of interactions take place between the teacher and the pupil in the observed work of the school? To what extent do pupils have a say in their curriculum as manifest in the classroom? From my perspective as an English teacher, I might ask whether the pupils have any choice in what literature they study. What is the proportion of Scottish literature in the English curriculum and what voice do young people have in that?

I could give the committee examples until the cows come home, because there are plenty of indicators that we can use. However, with respect, I believe that the question is extremely important. A great passion lies behind the document, and it would be tragic if it turned out to be yet another document that was just parked on the shelf and did not lead to any real development.

The Convener: I think that we have exhausted our questions. Committee members will agree that we want the knowledge of rights with responsibilities to be taught in schools. By that, I mean knowledge of councils, the Scottish Parliament and Westminster as well as knowledge of the social security system, of how to complain, of how the health boards work and so on. In your paper, you make it clear that such knowledge need not be a separate subject, because it can be taught in every class.

I do not know about other committee members, but from the letters that I have received from young people, I think that they are not interested only in single issues. Their interests are much more global and involve issues such as international debt, animal welfare and the

environment. They write very well and ask how we would vote on such and such an issue.

As Iain Smith and others have pointed out, when we go into local schools, we find that the pupils do not miss us and hit the wall—they ask the questions that we really do not want to answer. Certainly, in the run-up to elections, schools in Renfrewshire—the local authority area that the schools in my constituency come under—will invite candidates of all parties. Again, those children do not feel the need to hold back and instead ask the questions that frighten the life out of us.

It might be an idea to circulate copies of the young people's guide to committee members, so that we can find out what we are supposed to be doing in the Scottish Parliament.

Mike Baughan: We will certainly do that.

The Convener: I thank you very much for your contribution.

We will have a short comfort break before we go into private. I thank the representatives of Highland Council for staying throughout the meeting and for their hospitality, which I suspect will continue for the rest of the day. I hope that I will get a chance to speak to you during the break.

11:52

Meeting suspended until 12:05 and thereafter continued in private until 12:43.

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