

# **SOCIAL INCLUSION, HOUSING AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 30 June 1999  
(*Afternoon*)

Meeting 1

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**THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE :**

\*Bill Aitken ( Glasgow ) (Con)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS :**

\*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)  
\*Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
\*Ms Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
\*Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)  
\*Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab)  
\*Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
\*Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
\*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

\*attended

**COMMITTEE CLERK:**

Martin Verity

**ASSISTANT CLERK:**

Rodger Evans



# Scottish Parliament

## Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee

Wednesday 30 June 1999

(Afternoon)

[THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE *opened the meeting at 14:15*]

**Bill Aitken (Oldest Member of the Committee):** Ladies and gentlemen, it is with some chagrin that I record that I have been identified as the oldest member, which means that I am to chair the initial part of the proceedings. I should say that I am the oldest member, but only just; courtesy forbids identifying the second oldest.

Do all members have the appropriate papers? I see that they have.

I will preside over the first two items of business, before handing over to the elected convener. I should mention at the start that in this committee room there is no requirement to press a button. What members have to say will be picked up automatically.

### Interests

**Bill Aitken:** We will now proceed with today's business. I must bring to members' attention the requirements of article 5.1 of the Scotland Act 1998 (Transitory and Transitional Provisions) (Members' Interests) Order 1999, which relates to the registration of members' interests. Members have all completed and returned the appropriate form. Today we are required to ensure that no member of the committee has an interest that has not been declared on the form. That is to avoid any conflicts that may arise from time to time. I will now invite members, in turn, to confirm that they have no interests to declare.

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** I have nothing to declare.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I have been employed as an economic consultant. Over the past three or four years, I have been involved in that capacity in work on social inclusion strategies for local enterprise companies and Scottish Enterprise. I do not regard that as a conflict of interests, but it is worth recording.

**Bill Aitken:** I do not think that there is a conflict, but we will record that to keep the member right.

**Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I have nothing to declare.

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I should record my partnership with Ross Harper and Murphy solicitors in Glasgow. I am not sure whether that will create any conflict of interest, but one never knows. I am also a member of several legal bodies, whose work may overlap with that of this committee: the Law Society of Scotland, the Glasgow Bar Association and the Scottish Law Agents Society. Finally, although this is not a pecuniary interest, I am a committee member of the executive of Rutherglen and Cambuslang citizens advice bureau and a former chairman of the management committee.

**Bill Aitken:** Again, I see no problem, but we will record those details.

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** I have no interests to declare.

**Ms Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab):** I do not have any specific interests to declare, but I have worked in the general field of social inclusion for some time and have contacts with a number of organisations. I have been asked to sit on the advisory committee of Women's Aid and the advisory committees of a few local organisations, such as housing associations. I will inform the committee of any such developments.

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** I have no interests to declare.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** I have no interests to declare.

**Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** I am a member of the board of management of the Volunteer Centre in Glasgow.

**Bill Aitken:** Again, I do not think that that is a problem, but we will record it.

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** I am the chair of the Scottish Campaign for the Welfare State—the Scottish arm of the Campaign to Defend the Welfare State, which operates at a UK level. I am also a long-standing supporter of Shelter.

**Bill Aitken:** That will be noted. For the record, I have no declarable interests.

### Convener

**Bill Aitken:** We will now proceed to the election of the convener. On a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau, the Parliament has decided that the party whose members are eligible to be convener of this committee is the Labour party. I invite any member from that party who wishes to stand to identify himself or herself and to confirm their candidature.

**Ms Curran:** I am willing to stand.

**Bill Aitken:** Margaret Curran has intimated that she is the appropriate candidate. I take it that

there are no other candidates. Would Ms Curran like an opportunity briefly to speak in support of her candidature?

**Ms Curran:** Any politician can speak at length if given the opportunity to do so, but I will forgo that on this occasion.

**Bill Aitken:** I take it that there are no other nominations. That being the case, we have only one nomination before us—that of Margaret Curran.

*Ms Margaret Curran was elected convener by acclamation.*

**Bill Aitken:** I offer my congratulations to Margaret and hand over the chair to her.

**The Convener (Ms Margaret Curran):** I will give Bill Aitken his name plate, in case anyone confuses us.

**Bill Aitken:** I do not think that there is too much danger of that.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. This is a very inclusive committee—it is quite intimidating to sit here. I hope that we can relax as we proceed.

## Remit

**The Convener:** My hope is that we will have a broad discussion today. We want to be as inclusive as possible, and it is appropriate that this committee should reflect that. As I understand it, this is the committee on which most members of the Parliament wanted to sit, so we should all be grateful that we are here. However, that places a terrible burden of responsibility on us.

I do not need to tell anyone present, whether members of the committee or members of the public, that social inclusion, housing and the voluntary sector—the remit of this committee—are huge issues. All of us could come up on the spot with at least 10 items that we would want to consider. I would like us to start today's meeting with a fairly wide-ranging discussion, to allow members to give a view on what they think the committee should work on and where it should direct its inquiries. Towards the end of the meeting we can try to focus the discussion and work out an order of priorities.

This is a very important committee. Many organisations active in this field will want to have access to us and will scrutinise what we do. The Parliament will look to us to give it a steer on many significant issues. The broader community of Scotland, too—the constituencies and regions that we represent—will be looking to us to represent its interests.

This is a serious committee and I look forward to working with all its members. I have great respect

for the work that has been done by people from other parties, and I look forward to our having a constructive relationship. Many of the issues with which we will deal go beyond party politics and are very problematic, so I hope that we can work together constructively.

Before opening out the discussion, I would like to bring one or two things to members' attention, as I have received a preliminary briefing. I have been informed by the Scottish Office that Mr MacKenzie, the head of the development department, has invited the committee for a briefing on social inclusion and the work of the department. That is an information-gathering exercise that we could do quite quickly.

One or two other organisations have been clamouring at our doors, and I am sure that we have all had letters from different organisations offering us advice and information. I think that I am speaking on behalf of all members when I say that we are more than willing to listen to what people have to say. However, that needs to be done in a structured way.

A number of options are, therefore, available to us. I now want to open out the discussion; we can return to specifics later. Who would like to speak?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I congratulate Margaret on her election as convener.

One of the first issues that we must address is the committee's remit, which is very broad. Some of us have difficulty with the term social inclusion, and it is important when we are doing our work that we clearly identify the real problems that we are tackling: poverty, inequality and lack of opportunity. That is absolutely essential.

I hope that the committee will be able to consider long-term strategies, particularly for housing and poverty. We should be aiming not just for long-term thinking and strategies, but for action. A great deal of analysis and information is already available, and there is a danger that this committee will overindulge in the analytical part of its work. As Margaret said, there is a great demand for immediate action on some issues.

In particular, I would like to discuss action that we can take on housing. Because there is no housing bill before the Parliament, it is important that at an early stage we ask the minister for her thoughts on the direction of housing legislation over the coming years and months. It is also essential that we talk to the officials. We should consider the responses to the green paper and the report of the new housing partnership advisory group at an early stage. The English paper on housing benefits will also have a major impact. We can move on those things very quickly, and I hope that we will do so.

Our priority should be scrutiny of the new housing partnership, because it is central to the Government's policy, particularly its stock transfer proposals. I call on the committee to examine the situation in Glasgow very soon, because even without new legislation there are issues for us to consider. That is particularly important because we are linking housing and social inclusion.

We should also examine what will be delivered by the Government's social inclusion agenda. I have asked the minister about the homeless review and whether those responsible for it will report to this committee. It is essential that they do.

We should also consider fuel poverty and, in particular, dampness. We should consider the links between committees, as that is an issue that has been raised during the past few weeks. Domestic violence, for example, requires a housing response. We should consider that actively.

I was interested to learn that the Rural Affairs Committee has highlighted poverty, employment and housing as issues that it wants to deal with. We should aim to link up with it. We should also ask our research support staff to look at the wider European dimension, particularly practice in Norway, Finland and Ireland on housing and social issues.

Above all, we need to scrutinise finance. If we can take a responsible role in ensuring that finance put into this area reaches front-line services, we will be doing the people of Scotland a service.

**Mike Watson:** That is the list for the first year.

**The Convener:** Thank you, Fiona. That was very helpful and will certainly keep us going for the first year.

This meeting is due to finish at 3.15 pm. I know that a number of people have commitments after that, not least the arrangements that we all have for the official opening of the Parliament. I will do my best to get finished by 3.15 pm, although obviously everyone will be able to contribute.

**Mr Raffan:** I congratulate the convener on her appointment.

First, I was glad that Fiona brought in the issue of rural affairs in her later remarks. I was concerned at the social inclusion seminar a week ago that we might be getting too Glasgow-oriented. Deprivation is not restricted to Glasgow, although it is a serious problem there. There are other cities and deprivation is also a major problem in rural areas, as I know only too well from my regional constituency.

Secondly, as Fiona said, this committee has a

broad remit, covering a large number of areas. The consultative steering group report recommended the setting up of working groups and made reference to cross-cutting committees. There are a number of areas in which other committees could be involved, of which one—on which I am party spokesman and which concerns me deeply—is drug misuse. I do not know whether this committee should take the initiative on that, but somebody has to. A cross-cutting committee would need to involve the members of this committee, the Health and Community Care Committee, the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and, possibly, the Justice and Home Affairs Committee.

**Mr McAllion:** The point about drugs is a good one, as drugs have a particular impact on poor areas. The Health and Community Care Committee and the Justice and Home Affairs Committee would probably take the view that that issue was part of their remit, rather than ours. However, we have a particular remit in that field. I believe, although I do not have the evidence for it—that is the purpose of this committee—that the impact of drugs on poorer communities is different from the impact on more affluent communities. It is part of this committee's role to crystallise that view.

Fiona gave us a long list of issues to address, as we all could. On the anti-poverty front, a ministerial task force has just been appointed to look into the causes of poverty and deprivation. It is important that we have an early meeting with its members to discuss the kind of work that it will undertake. The Scottish social inclusion network has also been working for some time on anti-poverty measures. We must meet members of the network to discuss activities in which it thinks this committee should be involved.

Representatives of social inclusion partnerships from across Scotland intend to have a meeting in Dundee this summer at which Wendy Alexander, the Minister for Communities, will be the keynote speaker. This committee should make every attempt to be represented at that meeting, even if all that means is that we are present and listen to what people at the cutting edge of poverty have to say about their predicament.

The list goes on and on. The Scottish Affairs Select Committee at Westminster has just embarked on a major investigation into poverty and its causes in Scotland. We should meet that committee to discuss how our work can interlock. However, that is only part of our remit on the anti-poverty front. There are also the changes to housing benefit. We have the power to look at any legislative changes here or at Westminster that might impact on the areas for which we are responsible, which those changes clearly do.

14:30

Despite the long list that Fiona gave, there are other housing issues that have not been mentioned, for example, Scottish Homes. What is its future? We must meet representatives of Scottish Homes. We do not need to interview them here, but we could go to see them and receive a briefing on their role and what they are doing to tackle housing problems in Scotland. There is also the question of the future of the social rented sector in Scotland. Is there a future for council housing? If so, we should speak to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and to housing authorities across Scotland.

The definition of public borrowing, which has a massive impact on housing, is another issue. Why should we not invite Treasury officials to come to this committee to justify their definition of the public sector borrowing requirement, which stands out against that used by the rest of Europe? Other European countries use the general government financing deficit as the criterion for defining public borrowing. A similar definition would allow local authorities to start investing in housing again, which they have been prevented from doing for a long time.

Recently, I, like every member at Westminster, was sent a letter predicting the number of early deaths in winter in my constituency between now and the next general election. Around 10,700 people in Scotland will die early during that period because they cannot keep their homes warm. Fuel poverty must, therefore, be a major focus of this committee.

If we go round everyone, we all come up with different lists of issues that need to be addressed. The committee should learn to walk before it runs. We should spend the summer thinking about all these different things and, if possible, taking briefings from the clerks and from other organisations involved with the committee, before we make any hard-and-fast decisions about the programme ahead. There is so much to do that we do not want to rush headlong into the wrong decisions. We should take time to consider the issues and then come together to discuss them in a more informed way than we can this afternoon.

**The Convener:** We can consider two categories: subject areas and how we conduct our work. We will come back to how we work.

**Robert Brown:** Targeting issues is a huge problem and we could spend the rest of our lives doing it, which is what John was moving round to at the end of his remarks. We need to identify the areas in which we can make a difference, rather than those on which we have a philosophical attitude, but where, at the end of the day, we cannot make a difference.

Among the issues that I would like us to home in on is the impact of the new housing partnerships in Glasgow. That is a key concern, which has a lot to do with the question of the PSBR and of capital investment in housing. If we can get that right, it will make a difference.

Fuel poverty has the advantage that the solution can be viewed holistically, in that, if we get healthy homes initiatives right, it will also have benefits for health. The effectiveness of such programmes is therefore important.

Opportunity is another important area, although I am not sure where our remit ends and that of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee starts. There are also issues to do with physically and mentally handicapped people and the ability to empower people to play a full part in communities on which there is some overlap.

The involvement of the voluntary sector is vital, as it is an important element of the economic and social fabric of the country. We need to increase the value that the voluntary sector adds in various ways. It is also important to examine the potential for working in greater partnership with the voluntary sector. Another issue that members will be aware of at the moment is the Bath Street citizens advice bureau in Glasgow.

There are a number of issues that we need to home in on, not least homelessness, which has already been touched on. This committee has the ability to examine homelessness from various angles to see if we can do something to get rid of what is one of the major blots on Scottish society—the number of not only homeless, but roofless people about the place.

Finally, we have a significant need for up-to-date, valid, reasonable and relevant statistics. The solidity of the information that we use is essential.

**The Convener:** The last letter that I opened before coming here was from Shelter and was about homelessness. Shelter's lobbying is very effective and a number of people have mentioned homelessness as a key issue.

**Mr Quinan:** I agree with much that John has said. It is important that we spend the summer talking to people. However, in light of the statistics that were released about poverty in Scotland last week, our principal purpose must be to address and deal with poverty—so many other things are directly related to it. I am concerned about potential housing stock transfers, but we are being driven to deal with them, simply because the time scale for their coming into operation is so tight.

In the summer, instead of planning local anti-poverty strategies, which I do not think have worked effectively in Scotland, I suggest that we take a leaf out of the books of the Dutch and the



Irish and we spend some time considering poverty proofing in policy. That should become our remit. We should look towards developing a proper national anti-poverty strategy. That has been extremely successful in the Republic of Ireland where the government is already 2 per cent ahead of all its target figures for the first three years. The Republic has many of the same problems that we have, such as homelessness, public housing stock and drugs, as Keith referred to. We should identify a means by which we can poverty-proof each of the decisions or legislative developments of the Executive and other committees. We should have poverty proofing on the basis that we do not allow, at the least, things to get any worse than they are. In the last year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is horrifying that two out of three children in this country are born into poverty. We must address that and address it quickly.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much.

**Mr Quinan:** I have one further point. The current contribution from the voluntary sector is tremendous, but there are terrible problems in regard to registration and charitable status. We must find a means to make things easier for everyone in the voluntary sector. We must also take a clear look at the manner and means of funding the voluntary sector.

**The Convener:** This list is getting longer. We can get information about the European countries and I think that everybody would support us considering it. It is significant information. I will come back to that point and organise getting the information later.

**Alex Neil:** There is not much room for disagreement with what has been said. Everyone keeps adding to the list.

**The Convener:** That is the problem.

**Alex Neil:** I have worked in this field off and on for the past 20 years. If people look at the figures over the past 25 years or so, they will find that the level of poverty is substantially worse now than it was in, for example, 1974. I remember a report produced by the National Children's Bureau in 1973 called "Born to Fail?" The report suggested that one in 10 children was born into poverty or failed as a result of low income, bad housing and high unemployment. Now that figure is nearer one in three. Part of our remit should be to find out why the situation has become steadily worse. More important, we should find out what we can do to steady the situation and put it into reverse, so that in 25 years' time we have a significant improvement in relative poverty rather than another 25 years of its getting substantially worse.

There is a danger of paralysis by analysis. We have statistics from hundreds of organisations coming out of our ears, but it is important that we

get to grips with the fundamental reasons why poverty is still such a significant part of Scottish life.

I agree with Keith Raffan that it is important to remember the rural dimension. A few years ago the European Commission designated the Wigtown area as the poorest area in Europe. Often when we talk about rural areas, we think only about the Highlands and Islands. We should think about all of rural Scotland, such as rural mining areas as well as the Highlands and Islands. We should work with the Rural Affairs Committee, which has put social inclusion in rural areas at the top of its agenda. An early meeting is important so that we do not duplicate each other's work.

Having said that, I think that we must recognise, looking at the total poverty picture in Scotland, the overwhelming importance of greater Glasgow. There is statistic after statistic about Glasgow representing 40 per cent of this, 50 per cent of that, or whatever. We must pay attention to and zero in on the circumstances in Glasgow where there is clearly a concentration of poverty and a significant proportion of our total population.

I have always been concerned by the fact that a lot of money is spent on social inclusion strategies. A range of organisations such as local authorities, the local enterprise councils, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Homes, education departments and all the rest of it, work out their own social inclusion strategies. We need—and I think that this committee can play a significant role here—a nationally agreed comprehensive strategy for dealing with poverty, so that all the public sector resources are channelled according to one agreed strategy rather than having things all over the place with bits of money here and there, a new agency here and a new agency there. A lot of money is wasted through the lack of an agreed strategy.

Much of the money that is spent ends up with what I call the woolly jersey brigade. It is used to employ people from fairly prosperous backgrounds, who visit deprived areas from nine to five. Not a high enough proportion of resources ends up in the pockets of the poor people. One of the useful things that this committee could do as an early exercise is an audit trail of all the money that the public sector spends on poverty, social inclusion and related matters, with a view to ensuring that a much higher percentage of the money ends up in the pockets of the poor rather than bolstering the woolly jersey brigade. Maybe I could have been counted as one of that brigade at one time.

In this committee we can take one or two specific measures that we do not need to wait a long time for. John has already mentioned fuel poverty and I agree that that is a high priority. We

need to examine the new warm deal programme. In comparison with what is happening south of the border, that programme needs a fairly early review because it is not targeting people to the extent that the same programme is south of the border. That is an issue for us to discuss.

We should not forget about food poverty. Food poverty is just as important as fuel poverty and it has not received the same attention that fuel poverty has in the past.

My final point, which we will probably have to discuss with the Justice and Home Affairs Committee—I agree with Keith that the drugs issue needs to be discussed with it—is about the warrant sales regime in Scotland. It is a pernicious piece of legislation and a good example of how poor people suffer from legislation. As an act of faith, I would like this committee to initiate legislation this year to abolish warrant sales in Scotland. Very few, if any, civilised countries in Europe have a warrant sales system for recovering debt. I think that the abolition of warrant sales would send a message to people in Scotland that we really do care. We are prepared, not just to talk, discuss and debate, but to do something. The earlier we are seen to do something, the better.

**Mike Watson:** I have a list of topics and have progressively ticked off every one. I will not repeat what others have said, but would like to highlight the things that I think are important. Overriding that, we must avoid falling between too many stools. In this committee there is no point in trying to skim the surface of a number of subjects and not getting deep in any of them. Fairly soon—I suspect not today—we must get down to discussing our priorities. I suggest that we should meet again fairly sharply to do that, whether it is before a briefing or not.

I am interested in the voluntary sector and would like to consider its role in a number of strategies that are under way at the moment and how it links with much of what local authorities are doing. As far as the voluntary sector is concerned, that would involve questions of funding and continuity of funding to enable it to plan ahead more effectively than has often been the case up to now.

From experience, I am concerned about the effect of the whole drug culture. There is clearly a difference in the forms of drug use and abuse. The so-called leisure drugs present an entirely different problem from the problem of those who are taking drugs as a result of poverty or those for whom drugs ensure that they remain locked into poverty, and that is an aspect that I want to examine.

14:45

I also want to examine the various agencies that

work on drug abuse, such as those that deal with rehabilitation. There is duplication and sometimes outright competition between some agencies and I want to investigate ways of drawing maximum effectiveness from them.

This committee, of all committees, should be getting out, seeing problems at first hand and meeting people. I suspect that many of the people we want to help are unlikely to come to the Parliament and say, "I have a problem and I wonder whether you can help me deal with it." We need to engage with those people. To be honest, I would have thought that meetings of the committee in Edinburgh would be kept to a minimum. There is a lot to see and the Parliament's ethos is about engaging with the people of Scotland. That is particularly important to this committee.

**The Convener:** I will let Karen in in a moment, but I want to put my tuppence-worth in. I only hope that this role does not silence me.

It is very strange to be agreeing with everyone—

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** You have not heard from me yet.

**The Convener:** Those are your words, not mine, Bill. At 3 o'clock, I will try to focus the discussion, but I want to follow on from Mike's last point. We have to hear from people who live with these problems. We have to access those people into decision making, give them access to us and let us hear their voices. That is most readily done by going out and getting rid of the intimidating atmosphere of the committee room.

During the election campaign—and even before the campaign—I discovered that one of the biggest issues for people who live in deprived communities is drugs. That issue came up time after time. People are not stupid; they are not looking to the Parliament or to any one party for magic solutions. The issue cuts across parties and it might be very constructive to examine it.

We need to show faith with the communities that we represent and with whom we want to engage by hearing what they have to say, because what they tell us is sometimes different from what some agencies and services tell us. We have to get the whole picture by allowing the most deprived people to speak directly to us. That is what the Scottish Parliament is all about. So many MSPs have said that the committees are where decision making is really going to happen and where power sharing will take place—indeed, we have all said it ourselves. If any committee has to get that right, it has to be ours. We might stumble at the start and not get things right, but if we try, I think that people will respect our efforts.

I am also picking up on the committee's

determination not just to analyse situations, but to get things done. We need to have proper briefings about issues, complexities and hard decisions in order to understand them, but there is no doubt that we must move into action. I think that there is broad agreement about that.

**Alex Neil:** When we go to the likes of Dundee, we should deliberately not have meetings at the Caird Hall. Rather, we should meet at community centres in housing estates. I have lived in Dundee. I know that some folk in peripheral housing estates find Caird Hall almost as remote as Edinburgh. We should make a point of going into the communities.

**The Convener:** I have a lot of sympathy with that point of view. We get a different perspective of residents' problems by going out and about with them and talking to them, instead of sitting in a formal meeting with them. We should be as innovative as possible about such meetings.

**Karen Whitefield:** I want to make a quick point because, like everyone else, I agree with most of what has been said. We have an extensive list of the issues that we think contribute to poverty and we have heard suggestions about how to tackle the problem. I want the committee to consider the voluntary sector's role in helping to tackle poverty and to examine how its structure and framework might be inhibiting its contribution to social inclusion. Voluntary sector organisations are in the front line. They deal with people who are socially excluded. They also provide services to the community and are a major employer. I want to ensure that the committee does not forget the voluntary sector, but will regard it as forming a central part of our work.

**Bill Aitken:** There is a remarkable and encouraging consensus on the committee for a readily identifiable concern. I think that everyone recognises that the issues are clear. However, we have to prioritise. Issues such as drugs and poverty will require input from other committees and from other Government departments.

Keith Raffan made a good point about rural poverty. I do not want to be thought dismissive of that problem, but I think that the inner cities are the real crux of the matter. The situation in Glasgow—which I am sure is not very different from that in other major cities—is alarming. We could have a blame culture and point to a lack of housing investment and past policies that were never going to work, but we are now confronted with a problem that we have to do something about.

We should urgently consider housing stock transfers. I am aware that certain parties and individuals have misgivings about that issue. I was supportive of the move when I was a city

councillor, although I had reservations about the mechanics of its implementation. Unless we arrest the decline of housing standards in Glasgow, the problems faced by the committee will multiply and magnify.

The problem of drug abuse, particularly in peripheral estates, is of most urgent concern to us and the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, which will have to become involved in those discussions. I would encourage our going to see the extent of the difficulties for ourselves. I sometimes like to think that I am pretty streetwise, but there are some areas of Glasgow that even I am unfamiliar with and I am sure that my ignorance will be categorically displayed when I am taken to far and distant places such as Dundee.

This has been an encouraging start. The problems have been identified and I think that the committee has shown that it is committed to ameliorating them in some small way.

**The Convener:** One or two points are coming up time and again. The fact that this is a cross-cutting issue is not easily solved, because the other committees are presumably saying the same about crossing over with us.

What we agree here is not cast in stone. We can review our decisions and revise them if they are not working. If we think an issue is directly related to poverty, we can examine it and refer our findings on to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee or to the Health and Community Care Committee. If we wait for all the inter-departmental issues to be resolved, we will probably wait for some time, but I do not want to get into territorial warfare with other committees. I am sure that no one here wants to get involved in that sort of bureaucracy.

Having sounded out other colleagues, I believe that most committees have expressed a willingness to work with each other. If we cross into another committee's territory, we will sort that problem out when we get there.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I take your point about addressing the issues that we think affect poverty. Lloyd made the point that, instead of tackling an issue as it arises, we might have a system—as in Ireland—of making sure that we can automatically identify which issues need poverty proofing. That would certainly facilitate our work.

**Mr Raffan:** I do not think that there is any need for territorial warfare. This is the committee that is probably most involved in what we might call cross-cutting issues. I agree with the point about prioritising, but there is a great danger in getting bogged down in a lengthy inquiry into the first priority. I have seen that happen at Westminster. We cover many different issues, which is why I

brought up the issue of working groups and cross-cutting committees, which should be urgently discussed in the committee of conveners—or the conveners of committees's committee, or whatever it is called.

We want to get to grips with this important issue early. It may be that two or three members of this committee can, with members of other committees, set up a working group to examine a particular issue—say drugs—while others, such as Fiona, concentrate on the issue of homelessness. That would allow us to cover a lot of the different issues that are within our remit at one time, rather than tackle one issue at a time.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I strongly agree with that suggestion. The idea of a twin-track agenda is important, rather than an issue to be tackled discretely.

**The Convener:** I believe that we can consider establishing sub-committees as well.

**Mr McAllion:** Much of the work on the drugs question has been done already. It is only a couple of years since the Scottish Affairs Select Committee held a comprehensive inquiry into drugs in Scotland and looked at the decriminalisation and legalisation of cannabis. This committee should focus on the impact of drugs on poor areas, as the problem there is qualitatively different from that in the rest of the country. That would add to work that is already on the record and it is the kind of work that we can most usefully do. There is no point going over all the Scottish Affairs Select Committee's work, as it went to America, to Holland—

**The Convener:** We are not doing that.

**Mr McAllion:** It went everywhere in the world except Scotland to look at Scotland's drug problem. We can focus on drugs as they impact on Scotland, and we should be trying to prioritise that issue. The United Nations recommended that every nation should develop a national strategy for the eradication of poverty, and this is one of the few nations that has not done that so far. A priority for this committee could be to suggest proposals for a strategy, as such strategies work in other countries.

We will have to meet again, as we cannot decide this afternoon what the committee's priorities should be. We will have to go away, think about it and come back. Mike is quite right—there should be an early meeting so that we can focus on what we think the priorities should be and what can be done quickly.

**The Convener:** I will take a few more contributions and then I will come back to hard decisions.

**Mr Quinan:** Funnily enough, I want to follow on

from another point that John made.

The effect of the hard drug culture in poor areas, particularly with the explosion in the use of heroin, in some ways defines Glasgow and Glasgow's huge poverty problems. One issue that has never been looked at properly is the black economy. What is the product of the multi-million pound heroin business that exists in Scotland and, dare I say it, how will we replace that money? According to the latest study carried out in Glasgow, that business makes somewhere in the region of £60 million to £70 million a year in Glasgow alone. Is there room for manoeuvre in the Barnett formula to replace that money? This issue is seldom discussed, but we have to address it.

One of the principal reasons the new deal is failing—

**The Convener:** I can sense a bit of breakdown now.

**Mr Quinan:** If people from certain housing schemes—from the centre of Glasgow to Dundee, to Dumbarton, to Ayr—have the option of either a week's benefit, plus a tenner, or the potential to make £1,000 or £1,500 a week, what choice will they make? What choice are people making? We have to address the economics of the drugs issue—not just the economics of the costs to the health service or to the emergency services, or of the collateral damage in communities. We have to address where that money comes from and where it is going, and what the economic effect would be of the eradication of the drug problem in Scotland.

**The Convener:** I think that people who live with the drug problem have important things to say as they can speak volumes about the economics of drugs. We must hear that.

I will take a few more general points and then I will move on, as it is almost 3 o'clock.

**Alex Neil:** We will not work out the committee's work programme today, but it seems to me that there are two broad categories. There are very specific, discrete bits of work—on drugs, for example—and I agree with John that we should add value to what has been done rather than replicate it. We have mentioned a number of other areas where there is work to be done, and we should tackle them.

The other category is the all-embracing, social inclusion, social justice, anti-poverty issue. We must develop a strategy. I see this committee's role as developing the Scottish anti-poverty strategy over the next few months. To kick that off, it would be useful to get an inventory of all the social inclusion and anti-poverty initiatives that have been set up in Scotland, either from the research department or from the department itself, as I do not think that anyone has the big picture of

what is going on yet.

15:00

The enterprise department knows what bodies such as Scottish Enterprise are doing; the local government people know what the local authorities are doing; the Scottish Office development department knows what the regeneration and social inclusion partnerships are doing; but I do not think that anyone has brought the whole thing together. Rather than repeating the poverty statistics, it would be extremely useful to conduct a mapping exercise of what is going on in Scotland now in relation to social inclusion initiatives, local anti-poverty strategies and so on, coupled with a briefing on what happens elsewhere—particularly in Ireland, the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden. It might also be useful to compare Scotland with the rest of Europe. For example, Eurostat, the European Union's statistical office in Luxembourg, produced a substantial report last Friday that showed that the gap between income and wealth in this country is among the worst in the EU. A summary of that analysis showing how we compare with the rest of the EU would be a useful briefing for the committee.

It would also be useful to have a note of the department's structure. There is a development department and a Minister for Communities, but it would be useful to have an early definition of whether the development department alone is the department that deals with social inclusion, housing and local government, or whether the department is covered by two ministers. How is the departmental structure set up?

**The Convener:** I think that that is what the department is offering us and the purpose of the visit is to explain a lot of that detail.

**Alex Neil:** It would be useful if we could have an early visit.

**The Convener:** Robert wants to come in, and then we will move on, unless anyone else wants to speak.

**Robert Brown:** I think that Alex's idea of an inventory is a great one. We all come at these issues from different perspectives and with different bits of knowledge about different areas. We must also get ourselves up to speed on what information is available. On drugs and other issues, Mike made the point that we should get a start point and a cache—if you like—of where we are going.

The other question is how we develop priorities. To some extent, perhaps, you have a role, convener, to produce a paper—or to ask the clerks to produce a paper—for the next meeting. It should detail some of the issues and try to put

them into order. Specific bits of work are outstanding and I am not keen to lose the opportunity to get ahead with things that make a difference at the expense of things that are further down the philosophical hierarchy. I think that that is the way forward.

We should have an early meeting in the "holiday" period, which would allow us to make decisions and to move on to the working groups that have been talked about.

**The Convener:** I am beginning to see the discussion take shape. There are a number of strands, one of which is that members are asking for a lot of background briefings—perhaps a visit to the department or to the social inclusion network, which I think wants to meet us reasonably soon so that it can brief us on what is being done. It would be foolish not to be briefed on what the Executive is planning to do, or on what has been reported already. Members have raised interesting questions about the big picture and about where we are, and I think that we should follow up some of those suggestions.

We then need to get a balance of different interests. We can examine and dissect specific issues, such as the housing stock transfer in Glasgow. Then there are other, bigger issues, such as housing. John raised a series of issues under housing. Perhaps we should package them and prioritise within that group. There are also issues around the ways in which we conduct our business and how we engage with the wider community—the people who are watching the workings of this committee—as I think that that will be the test of whether the Parliament works. I would be keen to take up Robert's suggestion of presenting a paper to the next meeting that deals with those three strands of our work. It must be relatively straightforward to get information on the European approaches—

**Robert Brown:** The idea of a national strategy is fine, and I think that we need it. We must be careful that it is not top-down strategy and that we build it up from the bottom, empowering people in local areas. Within a broad context, there is a risk that we will be seen as a supercommittee at work, saying, "Let's solve the problem."

**The Convener:** Although we say that the woolly jumpers leave at 5 o'clock, some of them do very valuable work in those communities.

**Alex Neil:** You understand the point that I was making.

**The Convener:** Absolutely, I know the point that you were making. I am sure that you intended no disrespect.

**Alex Neil:** I counted myself as one of them.

**The Convener:** There are many people who

know their business. Although we may once have been of them, we are not any more. We must hear what they have to say. There are many stakeholders who have done significant work and who probably have papers ready to give us that ask us to do and think about various things. It would be improper of us to rush into things without giving those people clear access to our committee. They are well-informed and knowledgeable, and if they have done a lot of thinking and made recommendations, we do not need to go over that ground again.

Robert is absolutely right: we should not approach this in a top-down way. What we do is about empowering the workers in this field as well as their communities, and we must be open and inclusive.

**Mr McAllion:** I hope that stock transfer is not going to be treated as a purely Glasgow issue. Other councils across Scotland are doing it too, and it must be looked at across Scotland.

**Bill Aitken:** I think that it is generally accepted as a country-wide issue.

**Alex Neil:** We were suggesting early meetings, but yesterday the Rural Affairs Committee put social inclusion at the top of its agenda. Before either committee begins work, it would be appropriate to have a meeting between the two conveners, if not the two committees.

**The Convener:** I understand that there will be a committee of conveners. I hope that it will meet very soon and give us a steer on sub-committees, inter-committee meetings and work programmes.

**Mr Raffan:** I do not want to repeat a point that has been made already, but Mike and I have both made points about visits. That is tremendously important. I had a meeting with Scottish Drugs Forum last week, and there is a feeling that officials in the public health policy unit and at the Scottish Office and so on do not get out on the ground often enough. It is very important that we do.

Much work has been done on drugs, but there is a great deal of concern about the imbalance of Government expenditure in favour of detection and the courts, for example. Three quarters of the money is allocated to them and only a quarter is spent on treatment and aftercare. Thousands of drug addicts are queueing up for treatment and not getting it. We must deal with that, as it is crucial for inner-city housing estates.

**Fiona Hyslop:** We are moving to the stage at which we must identify what we take forward. We have identified various subjects, and we are starting to identify key areas. It is important that at our next meeting we ensure that we are keeping strategic issues in mind—the bigger picture—as

well as dealing with short-term issues. This is the committee that must be seen to be doing things. A good way of organising a paper for the next meeting might be to capture what we have already discussed and to make recommendations for short-term, tactical things that we want to do, as well as strategic long-term things.

**The Convener:** There is a very tall order for this paper for the next meeting. What is the committee's view about when next we should meet and what information we should try to have? We might be able to get quite a bit fairly quickly.

**Mike Watson:** I think that we should combine the informal briefing with a meeting at which we decide what our initial priorities are. We should not get involved in any more than two investigations—I am quite comfortable with a twin-track approach in a committee of this size—but we should decide what those investigations are. That is not because we need to be seen to be doing something, but because there is a great deal for us to do, and we must get started.

We need briefings, because we come from various backgrounds and have different levels of experience in this broad field. We should seek a meeting that combines a briefing session on the subjects that we think are initially most important, and at that same meeting set out our initial priorities. That must be during the recess. Understandably, people have holiday arrangements and so on over the next eight weeks, but I suggest that there must be a recess meeting.

**The Convener:** I would be sympathetic to that.

**Fiona Hyslop:** We should be looking to develop work over the summer. I know that people have holiday arrangements, so rather than have just the one meeting, we should have a rolling programme across the summer. The key meeting is, as Michael said, the briefing session and the meeting to prioritise the work. We should come away from that knowing what we are going to be doing.

**Mike Watson:** The date of that meeting will depend to some extent on when the briefing will be available, and people offering the briefing will obviously also have arrangements during July and August.

**The Convener:** We are suggesting different tiers of briefings.

**Mr Raffan:** I am not averse to meeting over the recess, but there is a practical problem, which was encountered at the joint meeting of the Finance Committee and the Audit Committee this morning, which is that people are all away at different times. The last thing we would want is for this committee, just as it is beginning to get off the ground, to have members absent so that some are more up to

speed than others on a particular issue. That must be borne in mind. I disagree with Fiona's suggestion. I am not averse to it work-wise, but I do not think that it will be practical to have a rolling programme of meetings through the recess with people going away at various times. If there are going to be briefing sessions, they should be either early or late because, as we discovered this morning, that is more likely to accommodate most members.

**Alex Neil:** It might be appropriate to have the briefing meeting combined with the work programme meeting in the next couple of weeks or so. We could then have a meeting a week or so before the recess ends, so that we resume after the recess with our work programme agreed and having made a start on implementing it. That would give us two meetings technically during the recess—one at the beginning and one at the end—and that would I hope fit in with people's holiday arrangements and the need to make a start on some work.

**The Convener:** I am not averse to that. That suits my arrangements.

**Mr McAllion:** That is a sensible suggestion. Most people are going away in the last fortnight of July and the first fortnight of August, so they are non-weeks.

**The Convener:** That does not cut across any school holidays, and if it does I can manage my arrangements. We will try to meet in the next two weeks. Although it is probably a bit much to ask for a huge briefing, we will get something. Also, there are many papers that could be sent out and that we could read over the summer, even if we cannot meet formally.

**Alex Neil:** Perhaps for our first meeting we should take up Mr MacKenzie's offer, and kill two birds with one stone, as it were.

**The Convener:** The suggestion is that early in the morning we could go to Mr MacKenzie's office for a briefing. That might last for an hour or an hour-and-a-half. We could then have a break and convene after that. I will do my best to get a paper together that reflects what we have talked about and sorts them into long and short-term priorities, with perhaps some suggestions for investigations. By that time, I will have pursued some of the issues about sub-committees and working groups and have some answers on that.

It is now one minute before quarter past three. Are we all agreed?

**Members:** Yes.

**The Convener:** Hopefully, the clerk will negotiate with people about dates, or should we set one now? It would be helpful to do it now.

**Bill Aitken:** I do not have my diary.

**The Convener:** Some members cannot set a date now. We need to negotiate about this, but people will be around and at their desks for the next while. I hope that the journalists notice that we are not having 17 weeks' holiday. Thank you very much. That was a very constructive experience.

*Meeting closed at 15:14.*





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