

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 31 October 2001
(*Morning*)

Session 1

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SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

25th Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

*Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

*Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

*attended

WITNESSES

Harriet Eadie (Active Communities Forum)

Mai Hearne (CVS Scotland)

Brian Magee (Volunteer Development Scotland)

Norrie Murray (Volunteer Development Scotland)

Maureen O'Neill (Active Communities Forum)

Claire Stevens (Active Communities Forum)

Anne Toye (CVS Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lee Bridges

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mary Dinsdale

ASSISTANT CLERK

Craig Harper

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Social Justice Committee

Wednesday 31 October 2001

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 10:03]

Item in Private

The Convener (Johann Lamont): Welcome to the 25th meeting in 2001 of the Social Justice Committee.

Do members agree to discuss in private item 5 on consideration of a draft report to the Finance Committee on the budget?

Members indicated agreement.

10:03

Meeting continued in private.

10:11

Meeting continued in public.

Voluntary Sector Inquiry

The Convener: I again welcome everybody to the meeting, in particular witnesses who will give evidence to our inquiry into the voluntary sector.

I thank Brian Magee and Norrie Murray from Volunteer Development Scotland for attending. Brian Magee is the head of policy at the active communities development unit and Norrie Murray is head of the local volunteering development agency unit—I hope that that is right.

As is usual, the witnesses may say something and committee members may then ask questions.

Brian Magee (Volunteer Development Scotland): On behalf of Volunteer Development Scotland, which is the national centre for volunteering and community involvement, we welcome the invitation to give evidence to the Social Justice Committee's inquiry into the voluntary sector.

We see volunteers and volunteering as very much a part of the attempt to build active communities in Scotland. Volunteers make a distinguished contribution to every area of social and community life. In democratic terms, volunteers and voluntary action are essential components of a free society and an integral part of strong and active citizenship. They create a sense of community, identity and ownership. The phenomenon of volunteering and the right to volunteer are indicators of the strength of a country's democracy—that is where volunteering fits into society.

I have only a short time, but I would like to pick up on some points in our submission on why volunteers matter, the infrastructure that supports volunteering in Scotland, regulation that affects volunteering and the funding of volunteering. I will say something about the need for the continued independence of volunteering and I will refer to baseline research that is needed. I also want to consider some issues that relate to sustaining volunteering in Scotland.

Why do volunteers matter? The empowerment of communities needs huge involvement by volunteers. Volunteering can act as a trigger for empowering communities and can offer people new and varied means and opportunities for becoming involved in local community planning and decision making. Voluntary engagement is a key element in community and neighbourhood regeneration. It builds social capital, which is about trust, solidarity and participation.

People's contribution to civil society by participating in parliamentary and other kinds of democracy locally, and by celebrating the building of religious, cultural and social values is crucial to the committee's considerations. My paper gives a range of ways in which volunteers make that contribution by providing services, serving on boards, committees or councils, tackling major issues and addressing needs through establishing credit unions, drugs projects, parental support groups and counselling services.

10:15

Volunteers in Scotland also deal with aspects of social welfare that fall through the statutory net in the huge self-help and mutual aid sector. We would like that to be recognised and supported as bringing about innovative new solutions to problems, often on a small scale and at a local level. Volunteers matter because of their achievements.

As volunteering involves all sectors of the community—people from different walks of life, from different age ranges, of all abilities and from throughout Scotland—it makes a contribution to the Executive's social justice and inclusion agendas. As for policy and planning, the image of volunteers is that they deliver services. We would like to extend that notion to include the involvement of volunteers in planning and policy making. However, some considerations about that must be taken on board. The time scales for local volunteer-led agencies must be understood. Many such groups are managed by committees of volunteers who require support, training and time if they are to be successfully involved in strategic thinking about planning and policy making.

Volunteers in Scotland contribute £4.1 billion per annum to the social economy. From different pieces of research, we know that 50 per cent of Scotland's population volunteers at least once a year. According to the Scottish household survey, about 27 per cent volunteer regularly. That adds up to a huge contribution to the social economy.

My colleague Norrie Murray will go through our points on infrastructure.

Norrie Murray (Volunteer Development Scotland): The organisation for which we work—Volunteer Development Scotland—provides national infrastructure support for volunteering. We work closely with a network of local volunteer development agencies, which I will call volunteer bureaux, because that is easier to say.

We have provided some information about those organisations. Volunteer Development Scotland is based in Stirling and was established in 1984. The impetus for its establishment came from organisations, including the Scottish Council for

Voluntary Organisations, which were unhappy with the infrastructure support for volunteering in Scotland. At the time, that support was provided by the Volunteer Centre UK, which was based just outside London and was funded by the Home Office.

People felt that volunteering in Scotland was too important for it to be supported from 400 or 800 miles away, depending on an organisation's location in Scotland. Volunteer Development Scotland was established as an organisation in its own right. Our core funding comes from the voluntary issues unit in the Scottish Executive, but we add to that from several other sources.

My job at Volunteer Development Scotland is to work closely with the network of local volunteer bureaux. Like us, they take any action that they feel will make it easier for people to participate as volunteers. Their main aims are to inspire more people and a broader range of people to volunteer, to bring about more positive attitudes to volunteering, to gain better recognition for volunteering at policy level, and to build the capacity of volunteer-engaging organisations and volunteers to be well run, influential and effective.

The main customers of the bureaux are individuals who wish to volunteer, but who might not know how to get started. In one sense, the bureaux are like job centres for volunteering. An individual can go to a volunteer bureau and find accurate, up-to-date information on volunteering opportunities in his or her area. Volunteer bureaux help to give people a supported introduction to the volunteer-involving organisation and continuing support throughout their volunteer involvement. Many people in Scotland make use of the service. The bureaux help to build the capacity of organisations in their work with volunteers. They help organisations to develop volunteer policies and with volunteer recruitment, selection and training. They give continuing support.

One key priority for the bureaux is the active communities strategy. Earlier this year, the Minister for Social Justice announced additional funding for the network as of 1 April next year to implement key elements of the active communities strategy. There is an emphasis on the third and fourth objectives in the strategy, which are to broaden the range of people involved in volunteering and to increase their number. The network will have work to do on the first and second objectives, which are about positive attitudes and policy development.

Another key priority for the 38 bureaux in Scotland, which operate out of 50 offices and cover 29 local authority areas, is standards development. The impetus for that came from the network; it recognised that the increased funding from central Government meant that it had to

consider how it could achieve better consistency of service delivery. The network has involved over 500 stakeholders in drawing together a framework of standards. The network is proud of that work, which was an open and inclusive developmental process. The standards were presented officially to Jackie Baillie at an event yesterday. They give us a basis for developing our agenda of continuous improvement and shared good practice in the network.

The network is actively developing its use of information technology. The Executive grant aided the network earlier this year, which enabled each bureau to have a website on which to post information and details about volunteering opportunities. The network is keen to increase its profile and it recognises that not enough people are aware of the volunteer bureaux network. We are trying to establish a common name to be used throughout the country, which will aid greatly the opportunities for common and collective marketing to raise the profile of volunteering.

A key area of concern for the network in terms of social inclusion is its work with people who have extra support needs, such as individuals who have difficulties with self-esteem and confidence—perhaps caused by mental illness or long-term unemployment. Yesterday, we ran a successful conference, and there has been a report—“A Virtuous Circle? Volunteering with extra support needs”—produced by the Scottish Council Foundation, which made a number of recommendations for improvements to the work of volunteer bureaux with people who have extra support needs. The minister made one or two helpful announcements yesterday on improving the skills of the volunteer bureaux staff who work with such people and on piloting the use of personal development planning for volunteers where appropriate.

The Convener: I will begin the questions. Do you have a breakdown of the gender of volunteers?

Brian Magee: The United Kingdom 1997 survey showed that the ratio is 50:50—as many females volunteer as males.

The Convener: Is that reflected through the structures as they move on to perhaps more formal structures?

Brian Magee: There are differences between areas of involvement. In certain areas, more females are involved than males. More males are involved in decision-making areas and more females are involved in service-delivery volunteering.

The Convener: There's a surprise.

Will you outline more fully your role in the

implementation of part V of the Police Act 1997?

Brian Magee: The Scottish Executive justice department has invited Volunteer Development Scotland to run the centrally registered body. We have in principle agreed to do that and are finalising the grant arrangements for carrying out that work. We hope to start work and start appointing staff next year. We are setting up premises for that at the moment.

The Convener: You state in your submission that volunteers

“make a substantial contribution to the public and private sectors.”

Do you have information about the types of organisations that use volunteers and the types of volunteering that are undertaken? Do you provide any kind of support or advice to those sectors?

Brian Magee: Research shows that something like 23 per cent of volunteers are located within the public sector. I refer to, for example, health, social work and education. Hospitals and schools are examples of where that kind of volunteering takes place.

Within VDS we have a volunteering-in-health project, which helps to advance volunteering within the health sector. We also work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and I chair our public sector volunteering advisory group—of which COSLA is a member—to advance volunteering with local authorities. We have produced, and helped local authorities to put in place, volunteering policies and have been working with COSLA on that for the best part of six years.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): My questions are also going to be directed at you, Brian.

I refer to your submission, which I have found useful. In point 1.6 you talk about your organisation working closely with the Scottish Executive voluntary issues unit and COSLA in supporting the active communities strategy and in ensuring that the strategy is taken on board in all Scottish Executive departments and local authorities. Will you expand on how you are doing that and on how successful or otherwise you believe that that work has been?

Brian Magee: I started that work by having meetings with heads of department within the Scottish Executive. I met representatives of the departments that are responsible for housing, education, community care and local government. I discussed with them ways of implementing the active communities strategy in their work.

In line with that I also produced draft guidance that will be issued to all Scottish Executive

departments and divisions in partnership with COSLA. COSLA will distribute that guidance on implementing the active communities strategy to all the community planning task groups throughout all local authority areas.

Those are two major ways in which we have been trying to mainstream the active communities strategy within local and national government.

Cathie Craigie: Do you think that there are any barriers that could stop that implementation?

Brian Magee: The four objectives are stated clearly and the people with whom I have discussed them think that they have value. More attention needs to be given to the strategy and its implementation. Some of the barriers could be cultural, attitudinal or could be the result of the sentiment that the work is something for others to do, rather than for us to do.

The more opportunities that we get to have face-to-face meetings, the more acceptance I find of the strategy as something that helps departments and local authorities to advance their agendas. It fits with what they are already doing and we must try to move them towards the development of action plans and a commitment to implementing those plans.

Norrie Murray: The volunteer bureaux have been given additional financial support from the Executive in the current year to undertake action to help them to prepare for their enhanced role under the active communities strategy as of 1 April 2002. We have received the plans for the funding, most of which will go through an open and inclusive planning process involving key local stakeholders—not just local authorities and health authorities, but voluntary sector organisations as well. That will be another opportunity to increase the profile of the active communities strategy at grass-roots level, and I hope it will be the impetus to get people thinking, “What are the key points in this strategy that make sense in our local area? What are the priorities that we wish to take forward?” I hope that the groups will identify other actions that are not included in the strategy, but about which they feel that it is important that they be progressed at the local level.

10:30

Cathie Craigie: In your submission you talk about empowering communities, which Brian Magee spoke about earlier. One way in which to empower a community is to give community volunteers the power to influence the decision-making process and policy. What is your view of how things have been working? Do you feel that volunteers have had an opportunity to influence policy in the Scottish Executive and at local-authority level?

Brian Magee: On a positive note, Volunteer Development Scotland recently received an invitation, which it has accepted, to become a member of the Government’s community planning task force. I am a member of sub-committee 3, which is examining the involvement of communities. Having got that place, we can work at a national level to represent volunteering interests in the community planning strategy. Part of that will involve new and innovative ways of involving local volunteering agencies in the community planning task groups in local authority areas. I hope that that will happen through that influence, but again, there is in the guidance to local authorities a major section on community planning, and there will be a recommendation to involve volunteering interests at the local level of decision making and policy making.

Cathie Craigie: We have taken evidence from other organisations and one of the points that keeps coming up is the time that voluntary organisations spend responding to consultation documents and sitting on task forces. You say that that is valuable only if you can make a difference. Do you feel that the volunteers are making a difference and that their voices are being listened to?

Brian Magee: There must be capacity building for those who are involved. For example, on the social inclusion partnerships and the community representatives on them, it has been recognised that they need help in speaking, in making their positions clear and in influencing decision making. It is not a foregone conclusion that people who are invited on to groups are necessarily capable at that stage of making the necessary contribution. They need capacity building.

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): You state in section 2.4 of your excellent submission:

“The contribution volunteers make to the social economy should be acknowledged, valued and supported by Government in Scotland.”

How would you like that to be done?

Brian Magee: I was referring to the announcement that was made by Angela Eagle MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Europe, Community and Race Equality at the Home Office, at the volunteering convention in England a couple of weeks ago where, for the first time, she referred to the need for the Government to recognise volunteers’ contribution to the social economy, and the fact that it would seek ways of measuring that contribution across government. I am interested in developing a tool to measure the personal, social and economic contributions and inputs of volunteers—not only for Government, but for organisations, so that when they bid for funding, they will be able to show outcomes in economic, social and personal terms. We want a

tool that is valid and reliable and which is accepted where it counts.

Mr Gibson: Do you want a standard throughout the United Kingdom or Scotland, or are you looking for a variety of different criteria for different types of organisation? How do you envisage that working?

Brian Magee: It would be good if everybody used the same criteria. We need to decide the economic value of volunteer time. Different ways have been used to consider that—the minimum wage, average income or how the European social fund uses its matched funding criteria to award certain amounts of money to volunteering. We need to decide together what is the best means of measuring the economic value of what volunteers do and we need everybody to use that means.

Mr Gibson: How will VDS be involved specifically in the Scottish Executive review of the social economy?

Brian Magee: We have made our submission to the consultation process and, like everybody else, we await the outcome of that consultation process. Some of the points in the paper that we submitted to the committee today are expanded on in our submission to the consultation process.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): First, I have a point about infrastructure. I was interested in what Norrie Murray said, and paragraph 3.1 of the submission—rightly—states:

“A strong national and local volunteering infrastructure is necessary”.

It then states:

“The existing volunteering infrastructure exists at both national and local levels.”

Is that a tacit admission that you do not believe that the infrastructure is strong enough to sustain what we are trying to do?

Norrie Murray: Volunteer Development Scotland and the volunteer bureau network have benefited considerably since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. Our investment has grown and, as of next year, investment in the volunteer bureaux will double. Our roles have also received confirmation, which is equally important. Steps have certainly been taken to strengthen Volunteer Development Scotland and the volunteer bureau network, and we are grateful for that.

However, we acknowledge that we need to strive for continuous improvement. Initiatives such as the development of the standards framework within the volunteer bureau network show that we are big enough to say that there are areas in which we could be stronger and in which we need to develop. The Executive has given us support

and we also get support from local authorities. There comes a time when we need to consider what action we can take to be more effective organisations.

At the conference yesterday, the point was made that resources for volunteer bureaux do not always come in cash. There were people at the conference from different sectors who said they had resources such as expertise and time. Such resources could contribute to making the work of volunteer bureaux more effective. For example, an occupational therapist touched on the value of volunteering and said that she would be willing to spend more time working with her clients in volunteer bureaux. Her experience had shown her how people who suffer from mental health problems benefited considerably from volunteering. The result was that, as a worker, she was spending less time with some individuals as their confidence grew and developed. However, she said that at the same time she was finding it hard to get senior management to accept that. She felt that her senior management did not value the work that she was doing to get people involved in volunteering. There are therefore some attitudinal changes that need to be made.

Linda Fabiani: Earlier, you said that 29 local authorities were covered. I am interested to know which are not covered.

Norrie Murray: Everyone asks that question. The areas that do not have volunteer bureaux are Argyll and Bute, Angus and West Dunbartonshire.

Linda Fabiani: Have you any idea why that is? Are those areas moving towards having volunteer bureaux?

Norrie Murray: Yes, we are moving towards it. In Angus and in West Dunbartonshire, we expect steering committees made up of local people and organisations to submit applications within the next six months for the central Government support that is available. In Argyll and Bute, the voluntary issues unit is in discussion with relevant bodies, including Argyll and Bute Council. I am not entirely up to date on that situation.

Linda Fabiani: I would like to ask Brian Magee about regulation. Everyone understands that we have to achieve certain standards in any services that are given to people, whether voluntary or otherwise. However, I have heard concerns from small local groups who feel that the regulation is such a heavy burden that they are finding it difficult to get volunteers or that volunteers are walking away. One group told me that it was beginning to find it necessary to have a staff member. The group does not want a staff member—it wants to carry on in the way that it has for the past 30 years. A lot of the concerns that I hear about are anecdotal, but do you have any

hard evidence on the matter?

Brian Magee: I will use a specific example. The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 causes us some concern. The Scottish Executive is working on standards at the moment. If those standards are enforced too strictly, my information is that organisations that are volunteer-led or that do not have the staff ratios to qualify could face closure. I have done quite a bit of research with fairly large organisations about the effect of enforcing standards that are too strict and that do not recognise the difference between paid staff and volunteers who contribute perhaps two hours a week in that care setting. This is about not enforcing the parity model to its completion in an inappropriate setting. The issue is not that we do not want standards, but that we want to ensure that the standards are appropriate to the volunteers.

Linda Fabiani: Do you think that we are moving towards that, from the Executive downwards?

Brian Magee: I am hoping that we will be able to forestall any provisions that would incur the loss of volunteers. Executive officials are open to our overtures.

Cathie Craigie: I am concerned about the issue, too, but perhaps from a different perspective. The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 was welcomed by most members, who felt that the different regulations were necessary. Similarly, in relation to the food standards and hygiene regulations, I believe that we need to have strong controls. Can you give me a specific example of where the worries lie in the voluntary sector? I do not believe that the voluntary sector should provide less of a service than a public or private organisation would.

Brian Magee: I can give you what might seem a facile example, which is home baking. Many volunteers in different settings provided home baking, but some of the hygiene and health and safety regulations have closed that provision down. You might say that that is fair enough, but we have found that some organisations have been affected because some of the services that they were previously able to provide have had to be dropped. In care settings, the development of standards may make volunteering too much like paid work. The danger is that people who want to volunteer decide not to go into that setting and opt for more informal settings.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): There seems to be some overlap between what Volunteer Development Scotland does and what CVS Scotland does. Could you give us an idiot's guide to the two organisations' work? Is there any duplication—or even some rivalry? When some of us visited Inverness and met Highland colleagues,

it became clear that that was an issue there. We were conscious that the local volunteering development agency—LVDA—did not participate in our visit or make representations to us on the day.

Brian Magee: I am not quite clear about your question. Was it to do with VDS and the SCVO or with the LVDAs and CVSs?

Karen Whitefield: It was to do with CVS Scotland.

Brian Magee: If it is a CVS question, I will hand it to Norrie Murray.

10:45

Norrie Murray: Before this meeting, I had a useful conversation with our colleagues from CVS Scotland. You ask about duplication in the work of volunteer bureaux and councils for voluntary service. My view is that their work has different focuses. The objectives set by the Executive's voluntary issues unit relating to the increased funding for both the volunteer bureau network and CVSs show that they have different agendas. They exist to do different things, although they are working towards the same aims. Volunteer bureaux work with individuals and try to involve them in voluntary work. They also work with organisations to build their capacity to involve volunteers. The *raison d'être* of councils for voluntary service is to work with organisations and to try to build their capacity to be effective in accessing more grant aid, in management and in finance. There is clear blue water between the two.

We do not say this often enough, but there are areas of Scotland where the relationship between volunteer bureaux and the CVSs is excellent. Here in Edinburgh, there is an excellent relationship. The local council for voluntary service, the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council—EVOC—ran the Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange for 30 years. A year and a half ago, following a proper process, EVOC decided that it would be in both those organisations' interests if they were separate and it was given support and encouragement to implement that change.

Volunteer bureaux and CVSs work well together in other parts of the country, too. We recognise, however, that in some geographical areas, of which Karen Whitefield has mentioned one, improvement is needed. I will say something about what we are doing to encourage that. Volunteer bureaux Scotland, which is the representative body of the VB network, and CVS Scotland got together a couple of years ago and produced a joint leaflet, which described the roles and functions of the volunteer bureaux and of the CVSs. That leaflet was endorsed by the Executive

and by COSLA. The reaction that I heard was that that work was useful in helping people to understand the differences between the network and CVS Scotland locally. We now have plans to update that leaflet and redistribute it.

When the same issue was identified in conversations that I had with SCVO representatives in the west of Scotland earlier this year, we agreed that it would be best to develop action at a local level. We applied to the Executive for a small grant and considered an area in the west of Scotland that would be willing to serve as a pilot, which turned out to be Karen Whitefield's area, North Lanarkshire. With the three CVSs and the one volunteer bureau—the North Lanarkshire Volunteering Development Agency—in the area, the Executive agreed to be part of that work. The grant money was used to hire an independent consultant, who has been working with the chief officers of those four organisations, together with the chairperson.

It has been reported to me that the work is progressing well. The CVSs and the NLVDA have identified clear remits for each other and are examining the areas where their work needs to be co-ordinated. They have established a liaison forum, where they can work out how to take forward any issues that arise and who should do what and in what way. We will shortly be meeting the SCVO to look at that work and to see whether the lessons that have been learned can be applied in other parts of the country where there are difficulties. We might ask the Executive to support that work.

Volunteer bureaux Scotland recognises that this is a key issue. We wish to develop good working relationships between the two organisations. When an area has a good volunteer bureau and a good CVS, that allows for effective delivery of services to the local community. What matters is the quality of service to the local community.

We have recently appointed a new vice-convenor, who has served as a board member for CVS Scotland. She is currently a staff member in the volunteer bureau. Over the next year, her sole responsibility is to try to improve our relationship with the CVSs across Scotland.

Karen Whitefield: My experience in North Lanarkshire is that the three CVSs and the volunteer bureau work closely together—for a long time, they shared an office, although they are separate organisations. However, we got a strong impression that that was not the case in Inverness. We need to develop examples of best practice across Scotland. We all want the best volunteering services to be delivered throughout the country.

In your written evidence, you touch on funding. You say that, if you are to sustain the number of

volunteers, volunteering needs sustainable and adequate funding. You also say that the Executive has recently given you additional money to ensure that the active communities strategy is driven ahead. The emphasis in that strategy is on getting new volunteers into volunteering. That is right, as we want people from ethnic minorities, older people and younger people to become volunteers.

We also need to recognise that each year 27 per cent of us volunteer regularly and 50 per cent of us volunteer at least once. Have we got the right balance between funding innovation and new projects and sustaining existing projects that fulfil specific needs in a community? If we have not got the balance right, does that threaten the future of volunteering?

Norrie Murray: Volunteer bureaux tell me about their work and their experiences with local organisations. The volunteer bureaux hear positive messages from central Government about the importance of the voluntary sector and about the importance of volunteering. However, when they get back to local level, they find the fault lines. In their reports, they say that they do not find the Government's commitment to the volunteering sector evident. Some say that, in the past few years, they have suffered a reduction in the financial support for their organisations.

There comes a time when organisations place more importance on keeping in place what already exists. They find it disappointing that, to access funds, they have to present ideas as innovative or follow pump-priming models of funding. That creates frustration for organisations. They deliver what they consider to be a good local service, local people are involved and local people benefit. Why should organisations have to think up ideas to qualify for funding? Trust funds, in particular, often have innovation clauses or provide funds for pump-priming projects. That makes for difficulties.

As the committee may know, the Executive provides important support, but it requires that its money is matched in some way, usually at local level. Within the volunteer bureau network the argument is developing that that approach involves high transaction costs—we have to go to local health sector and enterprise companies and to local authorities to convince them that they should contribute towards our funding.

The volunteer bureau network thinks that the Executive could provide it with its core funding requirements. As the Executive is clearly committed to developing the two networks, there is sense in the argument that it should fund the core costs. The volunteer bureau network is not talking about enormous amounts of money—it considers £80,000 to be appropriate funding for developing an effective volunteer bureau in an area.

A volunteer bureau might have more opportunities to engage with local funders if it asked the funders to undertake specific pieces of work. In the health sector, for example, more might be achieved by a volunteer bureau going to a funder with specific project ideas—for example, finding ways of moving people with mental health problems into volunteering, almost as therapy—rather than asking the funder to contribute to the core costs of the bureau's operations and to match the money from the Scottish Executive.

Of the five or six messages that I received from consultation with the volunteer bureau network, those were key points that it wanted me to feed to the committee.

Karen Whitefield: How do you think we can ensure that volunteers receive adequate training? That ties in with the point that Linda Fabiani and Cathie Craigie pursued. It is important that volunteers are properly trained, not only so that they can do the job that they want to do, but so that they get something out of it. Voluntary work is often a route back into paid employment that allows volunteers to improve their skills and learn something new. How do we ensure sufficient funding to allow organisations, especially smaller organisations, to manage and support their volunteers properly? That is easier to do in larger organisations, which might have a dedicated volunteer manager. Smaller organisations often do not have the resources.

Norrie Murray: More could be done at a local level to encourage some of the smaller organisations to work more co-operatively in that area. Often, I hear organisations that have the desire to train volunteers questioning how they could run something with just a few people. Within a mile's radius, there might be similar organisations with a few volunteers. If those organisations were able to co-operate by pooling efforts and resources, they might be able to undertake training without any additional resources.

That is important for some volunteer bureaux. The bureau in North Lanarkshire has made imaginative links with its local further education colleges and has used that as a resource—much of that is funded through the European social fund. Volunteer bureaux can explore that avenue in order to provide training for organisations.

There is probably also a role for Volunteer Development Scotland in encouraging funders to regard training as a requirement when organisations put forward bids and in ensuring the implementation of good practice through funding criteria. Funders could insist that allocations are made to volunteer training, that out-of-pocket expenses are covered and that volunteers are properly insured. Brian Magee is planning to

develop that agenda with funders.

Brian Magee: Volunteer Development Scotland is interested in establishing a volunteer learning centre. We would welcome the committee's support for that aim. We have placed a number of bids for the centre, which would provide online learning and so meet some of the needs of those volunteer-led groups at a distance. In that way, material that is delivered centrally could be fed out to local groups in the Highlands, for example, using the national grid for learning. Everyone in Scotland would have access to that learning through the internet.

The other difficulty is trying to ensure that any training is accredited. In the past, we have struggled to find agencies that would award a qualification for voluntary work. We are now thinking about how we can do that ourselves, so that volunteers can, if they wish, gain accreditation for their work.

Norrie Murray referred to funding. I have undertaken to call together all the major funders of volunteering to consider their role in the active communities strategy, so that we can prepare joint guidance on the funding of volunteering. Obviously, that guidance will take account of the training needs of volunteers and their managers.

11:00

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): At this stage, we come to a thorny issue. As your submission states, the Parliament and the Executive support volunteering. That is highly welcome, although I would not expect anything less. To what extent does the Scottish Executive recognise the independence of the sector? If Volunteer Development Scotland does not have a party view, perhaps both witnesses will have a view on that.

Brian Magee: Our submission highlights the fact that an element of volunteering clearly contributes to Government priorities, agendas and initiatives. However, the section of our submission on independence refers to the fact that volunteering has its own agenda, which needs to be recognised. For example, in debates on volunteering and active citizenship, there are cut-off points at which we must say that sometimes volunteering activity does not necessarily contribute to a Government agenda. For example, the protests against some of the happenings down at Faslane by one MSP—whose name I shall not mention—could fit into the category of volunteering, but would they fit into the Government's active citizenship agenda? That is a moot point that members can take away with them.

Mrs McIntosh: I doubt that they would fit in.

Brian Magee: You have answered the question for me.

The independence of the voluntary sector needs to be recognised. I am not necessarily saying that the voluntary sector is not independent under the Scottish Parliament, because there is a lot of evidence to show that organisations can still maintain their own mission and agenda while receiving funding. Ultimately, however—Volunteer Development Scotland has had to face this problem—although there is the possibility of compromise, there is also the possibility of not going down the road of compromise.

Mrs McIntosh: Is there also the possibility of confrontation over the voluntary sector's independence?

Brian Magee: Yes, that possibility exists and there has been confrontation. For example, some funders have come to the point where they have stopped funding organisations that were not in line with what the funder's constitution allowed under the compact.

Mrs McIntosh: Does Mr Murray have a view on that?

Norrie Murray: Since the Parliament started, the voluntary sector, the volunteer bureaux and VDS have been able to participate much more in setting agendas and contributing to policy development. It is important to strike the right balance. If the Government was working in isolation and announcing priorities and policy directives, that would inevitably result in difficulties. I feel that a shared agenda on social justice is developing. I think that volunteer bureaux throughout Scotland have been supportive of any investments and policy developments in volunteering. The active communities strategy was heavily consulted on before it was published and VBs were actively encouraged to be involved in running events locally. We did not feel that the policy had been developed behind closed doors or without any other involvement.

For me, finding ways of developing shared agendas is a key issue. The volunteer bureau network recognises that we need to become sharper at gathering together what is important at a local level and presenting it to the committee. We need to have much more of an advocacy role and highlight the important issues in volunteering at a grass-roots level to ensure that we inform debate and help to set policy priorities.

Mr Gibson: What you say is largely at odds with what Karen Whitefield and I were told last week when we visited Inverness, where we met 14 individuals who represented a host of voluntary organisations. When they were asked whether the independence of the sector was recognised, they said that it really was not; indeed, one individual

said that the compact was not worth the paper that it was written on. They said that the sector feels almost unanimously that it is often heavily compromised in its agenda and in what it wants to deliver because local authorities tell the organisations what they will deliver if they want to access funding. Do you want to comment on that view?

Norrie Murray: I think that I mentioned the fault line that is developing between the national and local levels. Some volunteer bureaux and organisations reported to us that they felt a dislocation between what central Government was doing and what they experienced at a local level. We received similar feedback at our conference yesterday. After hearing Jackie Baillie's speech, some people told me that her comments did not match the reality at a local level, where our funding has been reduced and our influence is not increasing.

There are issues about how national initiatives and policies can be developed at a local level and how incentives can be carried with them. I do not think that the stick approach works particularly well. Although the Executive encourages non-departmental public bodies, local government and the health sector to work in partnership and constructively with volunteering and the voluntary sector, perhaps it needs to sharpen its idea of the incentives that should be introduced for organisations that collaborate and have shared agendas.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I apologise for arriving late, courtesy of ScotRail. I suspect that that is one of the difficulties that the voluntary sector occasionally experiences as well.

I want to stick with the issue of independence for a moment. Although it is desirable to have partnership working and shared agendas at various levels, might such measures not result in a flattening-down of the voluntary sector's diversity?

My other question relates to the differences between central Government and local government that Kenny Gibson touched on. Central Government support tends to be given to organisations such as yours that are involved in activities such as building capacity and setting standards that are technical rather than related to policy. At a local level, there is a wide disparity among groups, some of which might fit the agenda and be favoured and some of which might not. How can the independence of the voluntary sector be enhanced institutionally or otherwise, particularly at a local level?

Norrie Murray: I am aware of certain initiatives over the past few years in which local authorities and the health sector have been asked to develop policies on volunteering and the voluntary sector.

That process gave them the opportunity to touch on relationships and how priorities were established. The national compact has also been mentioned.

We raised the issue with Government ministers yesterday and expressed our view that the source of tension was that democratic, locally elected organisations should be allowed to make their own decisions about policies and priorities. The ministers' response suggested a keenness to achieve a kind of balance. Perhaps Brian Magee could pick up on some of those points.

Brian Magee: I have a proposal. At national level we have the compact between central Government, the voluntary sector and volunteering. My proposition is to develop local compacts to enact some of the national compact's principles, so that we can have an almanac and a calling to account whenever independence is threatened. We should promote, and work towards, local compacts. There are examples of local compacts south of the border, but there is little evidence here of such developments.

Robert Brown: I have a follow-up point.

The Convener: It will have to be brief, because we are running late.

Robert Brown: I accept that.

You talked about standards and the difficulties of standalone organisations that are not part of federal set-ups. Is the idea of developing co-operative groupings of different organisations a good one? The volunteer bureau network and citizens advice bureaux are examples of co-operative groupings that have common standards. Would the development of organisations such as those be useful for setting standards? Would they help individual groups to resist funding pressures from local authorities?

Norrie Murray: It is an achievement that the volunteer bureaux have agreed a set of standards. The bureaux are independent, locally managed organisations that are not formally connected. They regard standards as a means of strengthening the network and their work. They also regard standards as a way of taking ownership of what they are about and how they can best meet local needs. They also regard funding as being attractive to organisations.

The issue of standardisation was raised at yesterday's conference. It seemed to be agreed that to progress the equal opportunities agenda—which was the context in which we discussed volunteering—the development of graded standards would be an incentive to organisations with volunteers to consider the equal opportunities agenda properly.

The Convener: I thank you for your attendance, your opening remarks and your responses to our questions. If you have points that have not been covered during this meeting, feel free to contact us again and provide any information that you think would be of use to us.

We will now take evidence from CVS Scotland. I welcome Mai Hearne, who is the CVS Scotland convener, and Anne Toye, who is a CVS Scotland committee member. Before I ask you to make your opening remarks, I thank you on behalf of the committee for the work that you have done locally to help us organise our visits throughout Scotland. An important aspect of our inquiry is going out into local communities and speaking to local organisations. We appreciate your support for that initiative. I ask you to lead off with a few opening remarks before members ask questions.

11:15

Mai Hearne (CVS Scotland): I thank the committee for inviting me to talk today. Before I start, I should say that I have been convener of the national committee for just under a month. Although I was on the committee for a couple of years before that, it is a bit unsettling suddenly to be pushed into the limelight. I have been doing a lot to get up to speed, even just in the past half hour. I hope that I can give a good account of the CVS Scotland committee and the wider network. Margaret Wilson, who is one of the paid officers of CVS Scotland, submitted a paper that lays out an outline of our work. I am happy to take questions on that later.

CVS Scotland is the standing committee of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations but perhaps only for the time being—one of our major pieces of work in the coming year is to examine the possibility of CVS Scotland becoming a standalone and independent organisation that would still have partnership links with the SCVO. There are mixed ideas about how that might work so we will examine every aspect of it during our review, including getting input from England where the National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service gained independence from its parent body some years back. At the moment, much of what we do is reflected in what the SCVO does.

Our infrastructure, which is made up of 60 councils for voluntary service, struggled for many years—since long before I came to Scotland 14 years ago—with low core funding. The CVSs depended on project work for funding, a situation which, as everyone knows, creates a weakness in the centre. Since 1 April 2001, we have received an excellent level of core funding—£60,000 for single local authority areas and shared extra funding for CVSs who have other CVSs on their territory. It is as if all the clichés arrived at once.

We felt that we were victims of our own success but dared not say that we were not ready for the extra money after begging for it for so long.

The money brought problems, but those problems would be easily overcome if we had twice as much money. Meanwhile, we will demonstrate our ability to work to our standards framework. The legacy of low core funding had certain effects. Before I give an example of that, I should declare that I work in Angus. Everyone, including Norrie Murray, should be aware of that. In Angus, we had a local volunteer and development agency for three years, the day-to-day management of which I was partly responsible for. It was as successful as could be expected, given that it can be difficult to get out to the glens and the outlying areas from a base in Arbroath, which is the largest town in the area. For various local reasons, however, we could not keep it going for another three years and we had to develop an exit strategy. We are trying to start it up again now. One of the reasons it had to close was low core funding. We cannot simply state that the new funding is strengthening the CVS network. It is, to an extent, but not as much or as quickly as we would like. It has meant, however, that we are not as dependent on projects as we used to be.

Robert Brown and Kenneth Gibson talked about independence from local authorities. Matched funding is a relevant issue in this context. If, as happens in Angus, for example, the local authority provides matched funding, you do not want to insult the local authority for fear of not getting paid at the end of the month.

The absence of a requirement to match the £60,000 has been great for the CVS network, although it is implicit in the Scottish Executive's paperwork that we will endeavour to match it. Some of us have matched wee bits of it in some areas. Not having to go to local organisations for matched money provides strength. It is wonderful if matching with Europe is achieved because that means that the jargon has probably been understood, if nothing else. That is felt to give an organisation status in the community that would not necessarily be achieved if it appeared simply to get local moneys.

Core funding from the voluntary issues unit—VIU—enables us to sit with a local authority and say, "We are here in our own right. We are independent. Our money comes via the VIU. We have strength that we did not have when we had to come to your meetings, cap in hand, looking for money."

I also want to touch on the active involvement of communities. The difficulty with active involvement for many communities is that, because of the jargon, they do not know what they are being asked to be involved in. Unless, when the Scottish

Executive speaks, there is a tabloid headline about somebody in Parliament that exercises the tabloid imagination—although I hesitate to use the word imagination—and sells newspapers, people do not really want to know. When we go to community group meetings, people ask me not to use words such as infrastructure and strategy. They are not interested—they simply want to know how to get drug addicts out of a tower block so that it can be used as a community centre.

I confess to a background in journalism. The Scottish Parliament could do with its own tabloid and its own way of communicating with people so that people in communities with whom we work understand what the new Scotland is all about and do not have to read what tabloid editors believe sells newspapers. CVS has a role in that. At every turn I try to encourage people to be involved in our day-to-day work and to consider the wider political picture so that they appreciate how many opportunities there are in Scotland.

Anne Toye (CVS Scotland): I want to touch on what Mai Hearne said about jargon. Probably everyone in the room is guilty of using words that are outwith our little confines and that other people do not recognise. "Infrastructure", "capacity building", "social inclusion" and "social justice" might mean something to us, but they do not necessarily mean anything to the man or woman in the organisation with which we are trying to work. In many cases, people have a mindset and do not want to hear or know about such words or phrases. They ask themselves, "How are such words relevant to my organisation and what I am trying to achieve?" We need to do more to communicate in plainer English what the Parliament and the voluntary sector want.

Education is needed to involve communities in what is happening to them. Consider the asylum seekers situation. People had asylum seekers living nearby and, perhaps by a lack of education or understanding of the issues, those asylum seekers were suddenly seen as a massive problem. People were not on board when asylum seekers were put into their community.

I saw a similar problem in North-East Fife—where, for my sins, I was an elected member and sat on the planning committee—through a voluntary sector and council perspective. I saw the refusal of a homeless hostel in St Andrews and the impact that that had on local people. A hostel was proposed for Cupar, but the local people were not taken on board. All the myths about homelessness were thrown up in the air: people thought that there would be drug users on their doorstep and wondered how they would know whether the people who moved into the hostel were paedophiles or down-and-outs. Unless we educate people that not everybody who is

homeless falls into those categories, that problem will arise again and again. A lot of education is required for the Scottish people.

Other strategies are required. Do the man and woman in the street know what community learning is, how it impacts on them and what it can do for them? Do they know what community planning is? How involved are they in the community planning and community learning strategies? The problems come from the fact that although we talk about community learning and community planning, the community is not involved. To a large extent, a top-down approach is taken, so there is a lot of imposition on individuals and people do not necessarily know what is expected of them.

Members touched on the independence of the voluntary sector and how it can be achieved. It is one of my pet subjects, so maybe we can come back to that.

The Convener: I do not think that witnesses have put in bids for questions before, but I am sure that we will come back to that point. If the witnesses have no further points to make, I will kick off the questions. Do the witnesses have any more comments on funding? Does the presence of more than one CVS in a local authority area generate difficulties? If it does, how can they be addressed?

Anne Toye: It can. There is more than one CVS in my local authority area. That creates issues. That is probably true for most multi-CVS areas. Different relationships are built up over a period of time with different CVSs, so there might be two CVSs that are well funded and three that are less well funded. That might be because there is some sort of history. Those issues can arise not only with the local authority, but with the health board and the local enterprise company.

The Convener: If the issue is one of history, how can it be addressed? In a lot of what has been said, a theme has come through of having to work together and build relationships. It feels as if clearing away the history and rationalising the structures might address the problems.

Anne Toye: That is sometimes easier said than done because some local authorities or health boards might recognise only one CVS, or one CVS might be considerably larger than the others in the area. I do not know how the problems are going to go away.

Mai Hearne: In the Angus local authority area, the £60,000 has been awarded to the Angus Association of Voluntary Organisations, which is the only CVS in the area. I have heard anecdotal evidence of difficulties in areas where the funding is shared. The difficulty with being in a single-CVS area is that as soon as the funding is announced

the CVS becomes a victim of its publicity by saying how wonderful the funding is. I am a wee bit biased against people in the statutory sector who seem to have it made much of the time, but partners in that sector tend to disappear because they think, "We don't need to worry about giving them money for any piece of work because they are loaded: they have got the extra core funding."

I raised that issue with the VIU at our training event in April in Renfrew. The senior civil servant in the unit, Sheenagh Adams, kindly wrote to the local authorities and health boards in Scotland to remind them that although there is no statutory match-funding requirement for CVSs, the authorities and boards should take the same approach because the CVSs need the same levels of funding support. Their response to her letter seems to have been to file it at the bottom of the filing tray and to continue to ignore the requirements.

Where CVSs share funding, there are difficulties, some, but not all, of which are based on history. Some difficulties are based on the local authority saying, "We give money here so we are not going to give it there."

I can sum up one of the biggest stumbling blocks on funding in a clever comment that just happens to be true. We are told that partnerships with the major statutory bodies can address issues such as funding and help in kind, but my experience of some of the partnerships that I have been invited along to is that they are clubs rather than partnerships. Once an organisation is part of the club it may be okay, but that does not percolate to the community groups that are desperately trying to get money. The issue of enhanced core funding needs early review.

11:30

Linda Fabiani: I would like to clarify some points. You mentioned the £60,000 that went to each organisation. Where there are multiple groups, how is the funding determined?

Mai Hearne: It varies. The original funding for everybody was £25,000. In the Highlands there are nine CVSs—compared with only two in Fife—and the original core of £25,000 was enhanced to £30,000, which was ring-fenced for a development role for all of them together. It was spread fairly thin.

Linda Fabiani: So the assumption is that it is cheaper to run multiple groups?

Mai Hearne: Yes.

Mrs McIntosh: Good morning, ladies. I sympathise with your comment about the jargon and the fact that some issues are not covered because of tabloid headlines in other directions

and so on. Everyone on the committee will agree that many worthy things happen but do not get the publicity they richly deserve.

Given that you mentioned the jargon, can you expand on the CVS standard framework?

Anne Teye: That is quite a lot of jargon. We are trying to develop voluntary and community activity. We are trying to work with voluntary organisations to ensure that they are strong, that they exist because there is a need for them and, assuming that that is the case, to ensure that what they are doing, they are doing well and with appropriate funding. We are examining how they deliver their services and ensuring that they manage their organisation, volunteers and finances well. They must be accountable for how they use their money. We are considering all those issues.

CVSs will work with local organisations to work up funding applications. In doing so, they will encourage organisations to ensure that they have policies and procedures in place so that they are well run.

We also help organisations to identify training needs and to access training. We help them to share good practice and services. I know that in several local authority areas, CVSs have established resource centres so that many voluntary organisations can operate under one roof, pooling their resources, so that there is only one photocopier and one clerical assistant and so on.

We also work with local groups and partners to exchange information and make the throughput of information easier. That means that when there is a change in Executive or local authority policy, we try to ensure that the local organisations understand that change and work to a similar agenda. At the same time, we encourage them to develop their own agendas, because independence is important too.

We encourage people to understand matters such as what social justice means, what social inclusion means, what social inclusion partnerships are and what all those things that trip off the tongue are. Community development means encouraging organisations to work in their communities to keep identifying the need for those organisations.

Mrs McIntosh: Thank you. That has clarified the matter.

Mai Hearne: The standards framework allows us to measure how organisations do that work. Before, the situation was a bit like the emperor's new clothes. People would say, "What do you actually do? Show us." If what an organisation does can be demonstrated in line with the standards framework, an organisation is nine

tenths of the way to satisfying its core principles.

Mrs McIntosh: The progress report that you have given us lists many organisations with which you have undertaken joint working. Will you give more detail about the types of joint working that you have done? Has that fed into your view on whether you will pursue other projects?

Mai Hearne: The joint working in which many CVSs are involved is similar. For instance, a requirement of our new funding is that we work with the community planning process. From the outset, the danger with that was that a CVS would be invited to a community planning steering group just so that a local authority chief executive could tick the box marked "voluntary sector". The CVS logo on the cover of the report that was subsequently produced would be enough, and people could say, "That's great." That did not work in Angus. I wonder why. I said that I did not have the resources or the time to go to such meetings, so that if I did go, my presence had an effect.

Various local authorities throughout the country have involved their CVSs at the community planning strategic group level and sometimes just at the operational level. There have been difficulties that I cannot document, because the information is only anecdotal, but representatives of some CVSs have been invited to meetings at which a local authority has called the whole community together—the business community, other statutory bodies and voluntary bodies—and picked who it wanted to have in its strategic partnerships. That gets us all nowhere. That is one matter in which CVSs had and have a role.

Other partnership working can involve a matter as basic as someone wanting to start a group for youngsters who are offending and reoffending in a town centre in a rural area. That person will want help with finding interests for those youngsters and obtaining community fund or other lottery fund money for the group. The CVS would be drawn into that. Every CVS will do such partnership working.

I have described two extremes of what we do. In between, there are many other examples. We must be careful, particularly with health boards, which tend to say hand on heart that they encourage their volunteers to be fully involved in the work of a hospital or a day care centre, but pay nothing for that, because they are volunteers. In CVS land, we must be careful not to be drawn into doing work for which there is no remuneration and no benefit for us to pass on as community developers.

CVS works with organisations such as housing associations. Scottish Homes' new manifestation is communities Scotland—I wonder where that name came from. Now that I have talked to

housing associations locally—I confess that I had had no involvement with them—I have found that the organisation is good. We have done much partnership working to exchange ideas. That has been good and the situation is developing in Angus. As chair of CVS Scotland, I hope to send that message to all my fellow CVSs.

Partnership working has been surprisingly good with the private sector through small business gateways. They came along and said, "What do you do? Who are you?" That is always a good opportunity for offering a presentation. They then started to share their training facilities with us. Those facilities are good and professional. The old image of people in the back of a church hall with an electric kettle, against which we struggle constantly, loses us support in modern, caring Scotland, because people say, "That conference was only in a church hall, whereas others are in a nice hotel."

Working with the small business gateways is something we will encourage through the committee. I do not know whether that is quite what you asked.

Mrs McIntosh: That has given me a completely new focus on the matter.

Finally, what is the relationship between CVS Scotland and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations?

Mai Hearne: I can be brief and save my neck, or I can be long-winded.

Mrs McIntosh: Just tell us the truth.

Mai Hearne: The truth is that there is lot of feeling in the network that we ought to be an independent organisation—independently constituted, with our own staff. Instead of having a CVS team that worked for us within the SCVO, we would have our own staff, and we would possibly even move to our own premises. I would like to see the result of the review, because I think that there are big cost implications. However, it would probably ultimately be good for the network to be separate. We would have a better profile and we could even help the SCVO with some of its difficulties—if it had any.

Mrs McIntosh: Why?

Mai Hearne: Because of perception, really. Even in the five years that I have worked in the Scottish voluntary sector in Angus, the SCVO has grown tremendously and has a great national profile. Privately, I was one of its harshest critics some years back and felt that it should be doing more, but the change of Government has been wonderful. However, I now feel that, while we are still very much in the communities, the SCVO's focus has altered. Unless we are to become mini SCVOs all round Scotland—which is not what we

are about—we should go it alone. That is how we can develop better community on the ground and support for the people we represent.

Karen Whitefield: What do you think individual CVSs bring to their localities? Is there any duplication with the work of Volunteer Development Scotland, or can you work jointly? We did ask Norrie Murray, so perhaps you can give us your thoughts.

Mai Hearne: A CVS is like a citizens advice bureau but for organisations. When organisations have difficulties, where do they go? They cannot really tie up CAB time with queries about funding, finance, staff issues and so on. What I do, in my neck of the woods, is encourage them to come to us. It is much like an individual going into a CAB. Someone will go in with a problem—a difficulty over school meals, for example—but will realise that there are far more difficulties in their organisation. If they tell the CVS about that, they can get help—or directions to help—at all kinds of levels.

On the LVDAs, I can really speak only for Angus. Angus Association of Voluntary Organisations is very good at what it is doing in Angus. That is great, but we have a gap where we are not delivering—to use the jargon—a volunteering service, because there is no LVDA. Part of my funding requirement is that I work with an LVDA, so I am working with what is effectively the small steering group for an LVDA. However, CVSs are well placed to deliver a volunteering service in their communities. If that is called a VB, that is fine by me. However, the overarching delivery should be via councils for voluntary service because a member of the public who wants to volunteer or start a voluntary group does not necessarily see that there is a difference.

Karen Whitefield: Do you think that there are barriers that prevent you from delivering on the objectives behind CVS Scotland in local communities, or do you think that things are working reasonably well at the moment?

Mai Hearne: In my neck of the woods, things are working okay. However, possible funding partners such as the health boards and the local authorities disappeared into the hedgerows as soon as we got our enhanced funding, and were almost beaten in getting there by the community fund and the other major trusts. I cannot really blame them, but as soon as we got the money, they all felt that we did not need them. However, our communities need them, so a local CVS's tasks include saying, "Yes, we have this core funding, but it is only core funding; it is only to pay wages and rent and to let us develop." The perception that we now have enough money and can be allowed to get on with things is a barrier. We really do need more money—and preferably

from the organisations that I mentioned.

11:45

Anne Toye: I am in a local authority area that has two CVSs. The funding that we receive is welcome, but it is not enough. We get £25,000 of core funding and an extra £10,000 on a Fife-wide basis, making £35,000. That does not pay for two members of staff, which is the number that we had always had, let alone pay for rent, rates and running costs. We are not the only small CVS in that position. Many other CVSs got £25,000 before and still get only £25,000. The rest of the money goes to a federation or a cross-local authority worker. The CVS is therefore still just one person; and in multi-CVS areas there is often only half a worker, with one person who is doing only 25 or 30 hours a week. The ability for such CVSs to deliver is limited: they have only the same number of staff as before but are being asked to do a lot more.

Karen Whitefield: Mai, is it your experience in Angus that partners are not willing to work with you? That is most certainly not my experience in Lanarkshire. North Lanarkshire Council and Lanarkshire Health Board do not say, either to the Community and Voluntary Organisations Council in Motherwell or to the Monklands Association for Voluntary Service, that they will not work with them. In Lanarkshire, we have positive working relationships between our two CVSs and the partner agencies. Does your experience relate only to Angus, or do you know of similar experiences nationally?

Mai Hearne: Our partners are willing to work with us, but they do not want to give us any money, and when I talk about them working with us, I am really talking about them giving us money. I could spend a lot of my week attending partnership meetings all over Angus and Tayside and they would love it and dine out on it, but I would not end up with any funding from them to help me to give them good, current voluntary sector expertise and information from their communities. They are not prepared to accept that inviting me along for the buffet is not enough.

The local authority gives my CVS some money to run a payroll; I desperately need that money just to pay staff. The difficulty that I come up against is the expectation that we can provide a free service. The working relationships are fine, but our service comes free.

Mr Gibson: In your progress report, under the heading of "Urban Issues", it says:

"The four city CVS have reformed their group and have discussed issues of concern, including how to enable all urban CVS to share knowledge and expertise."

From those discussions, what did you conclude to

be the best way for urban CVSs to share knowledge and expertise?

Mai Hearne: Unfortunately, I have not concluded anything yet. I have been in post as convener for less than a month and there will not be a committee meeting until 28 November. I am not based in the city, so I was not privy to those discussions. However, I await the outcomes with keen interest.

Mr Gibson: Would you be willing to supply the committee with that information?

Mai Hearne: Most definitely.

Mr Gibson: Thank you—I would be interested.

Given the answer that you just gave, I am not sure whether you will be able to answer my second question with specific details. However, I hope that you will try.

What specific challenges do you feel that the voluntary sector faces in both deprived urban communities and sparsely populated rural communities?

Mai Hearne: I will make a stab at answering that. I know a little about urban involvement because I come from a huge city, Dublin. However, as I said to one of your colleagues this morning, Ireland does not have a welfare state, so the voluntary sector there is very powerful.

The most telling challenges in Scotland seem to be about changes around housing—the move to registered social landlords. I refer to an example of a housing estate—Whitfield in Dundee—that has received lots of funding from all over the place for many years. There was great core development of various community projects within the estate. I did not work on any, but I knew from fairly sympathetic newspapers in the area that they were doing well.

The big change from local authorities running housing to a national agency running housing has slightly unsettled that type of development. There is great concern within housing associations about how that change will affect people in those housing associations—people who always thought that they were a cut above people in local authority housing. There is an inner-city issue around housing. People are worried about what the changes will mean. What they can expect after November with Communities Scotland is not being passed out to them quickly enough. The role of CVS Scotland in the big cities is, I hope, to work with the housing associations and Communities Scotland to find out what tenants are looking for.

In more deprived areas in rural Scotland, tourism is a vital part of life that the foot-and-mouth crisis and the events of 11 September have affected. Once tourism starts to decrease, all kinds of things in rural areas disappear. Wearing my

Angus hat, I gave some information to the members of the Social Justice Committee who visited Aberdeen—Robert Brown and Cathie Craigie were present—and I brought along a chap who talked about transport in Angus. Transport in rural areas is a huge concern.

I have probably wandered way off what you asked, but I hope that that helps a wee bit. CVS Scotland is aware of all that.

Mr Gibson: The committee took evidence from Dr Nick Fyfe and Dr Christine Milligan about their study on volunteering in Glasgow. Some organisations complained about a poor relationship with the council. Last week we heard about similar concerns in Inverness about Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council. Have you received similar complaints from not just Angus, but other parts of Scotland? How do you believe that good working relationships can be established without compromising the independence of the sector?

Mai Hearne: I will let Anne Toye answer that.

Anne Toye: You have passed the buck. The Executive could have a role in—

Mr Gibson: Holding the jackets.

Anne Toye: No, it could help local authorities and health boards to see that there is a good, strong voluntary sector and that it cannot function without funding. Otherwise, the funding will have to come from a completely independent source so that the voluntary sector is stronger and is seen to be stronger.

I do not have an answer to the question of how the sector can be funded independently. That question has cropped up a few times at training and networking events that I have attended with different voluntary groups. The question of funding and how we can get our voices heard is huge. We are not seen to be equal, and that is because we are funded by the health boards and the local authorities if we are fortunate.

If the money that we got were an add-on and something that local authorities and health boards could see as being of worth, perhaps they would sit up and start to listen to the voluntary sector and see it as a serious player, which it is. At the moment, local authorities and health boards say that they have their staff salaries and pensions, they have wards to look after and they have to ensure that various things are done before seeing what money is left for the voluntary sector. We are always left with what is tagged on at the end. It would be wonderful to think that that was not the case any more: that the voluntary sector was seen as being equal with everybody else and that our funding came from a separate source.

Mr Gibson: I am glad that you support

independence; I have always proposed that.

Robert Brown: You talked earlier about organisations developing their own agendas. Would there be value in a voluntary sector trust fund, which could be used to encourage local authorities to enhance three-year funding packages—not to pay the cost entirely but to give more support towards a specific objective? The fund would be under greater voluntary sector control. Is such an arrangement a possibility?

Mai Hearne: That would be excellent. We would welcome anything that encouraged local authorities to find practical ways of working with us rather than either seeing us as flavour of the month with the Executive—which is what was talked about last April when we got the extra funding—or seeing us as a threat. That arrangement would be helpful as it would be a separate pot.

Linda Fabiani: My point follows on from Kenny Gibson's comments. We often hear anecdotal comments from the voluntary sector. Throughout my constituency, I hear anecdotal comments about working relationships with the councils. I have been told that one council in the area that I represent wants to get rid of you guys and is working actively to do so, because it feels that its staff could do the job.

I have also heard anecdotal comments about councils trying to set up plans and force the CVSs to follow them. The council tells the CVSs that if they do not follow the plans, they will not get funding. The fact that nobody is willing to put those comments in writing to the Executive or to committees such as this is an indication of the non-independence of the sector. We have already asked how we can get over that. Have you, as the Scottish umbrella group, heard about examples of councils and health boards behaving in that way?

Mai Hearne: We have. Unfortunately, it has been anecdotal. Part of the standards framework requirement on CVSs is that people record that type of issue within their CVS area, so that there is a paper trail. We all know about gossip and backstabbing; that happens all the time in every workplace in the world.

The Convener: But not in the Scottish Parliament. Heaven forbid that anybody would suggest that that happens here.

Mai Hearne: As Rachel said on "Friends":

"I'm sorry, did my back hurt your knife?"

Present company is excluded. If we discount the gossip, serious things remain anecdotal. That should not be the case. There should be a paper trail or at least a process. It is a simple process to put in place in any organisation, especially CVSs, because the standards framework gives us

strengths that we never had before. There should be a process of keeping a record. If a local authority officer or a health board officer says that they want to run this and not involve you, you should say, "Okay, do you mind if I say that to my committee?" You are then sure that it will be in the minutes. If they say, "Oh no, don't," you can say that they should not have made the comment.

The Convener: Thank you very much for attending today, for your opening statement and for your response to our questions. If you want to develop further points, we should be more than happy to hear from you.

11:58

Meeting adjourned.

12:07

On resuming—

The Convener: I call the meeting to order and ask members to settle down quickly, so that we can move on.

We continue with evidence from the active communities forum. I welcome the forum's representatives. Maureen O'Neill is the chair, Claire Stevens is the director of Community Service Volunteers Scotland and Harriet Eadie is the convener of volunteer bureaux Scotland. I ask the witnesses to follow the same format as that followed by previous witnesses, by making a brief opening statement following which we will ask questions.

Maureen O'Neill (Active Communities Forum): We will make three brief opening statements that will pick up specific points.

On behalf of the active communities forum, the remit of which was set out in our written evidence, we welcome the opportunity to give evidence to the Social Justice Committee. The forum has a good cross-section of representatives from the voluntary sector, but it is important to note that it also has representatives from the Scottish Executive, COSLA, business, NDPBs and enterprise companies. The forum's representatives bring to the table considerable experience and information and assist us in our task of moving the active communities strategy forward. They also assist our understanding of the achievements of the projects that are funded specifically by the initiative, in the context of the volume of work that is undertaken in a voluntary capacity by myriad voluntary organisations. The views that we will express are general and were highlighted by forum members. It is important that I emphasise that individual organisations within the forum—never mind all voluntary organisations—might not share all those views.

Each organisation must be accorded the right to express its own view on policy and practice.

That independence of thought was mentioned on a number of occasions this morning. It is also stated in the compact between the Executive and the voluntary sector and in the compacts that have been created between local authorities and the voluntary sector, although the approach is not uniform. That independence must remain a key underpinning principle in the relationships between the different sectors.

One of the voluntary sector's key strengths is its diversity, an example of which is the potential within the sector for considering different sources of funding. It might be useful if I were to re-emphasise the SCVO's evidence that there are 44,000 voluntary organisations, making it difficult to categorise them into one little box.

The voluntary sector is large and complex. We must be careful not to underestimate the importance of infrastructure in intermediary bodies or the contribution that is made by small, local organisations that provide many opportunities for both voluntary action and volunteering. Paid staff from voluntary organisations provide public services on a contractual basis. Volunteering also takes place within the public and private sectors. Defining the voluntary sector remains a difficult task, but management by volunteers and the giving of time lie at the heart of the sector.

The sector embraces community action and service provision. It is able to challenge the status quo and to contribute to democratic processes by engaging individuals and communities in determining both policy and the shape of services, as well as how they are delivered. There is a real opportunity for individuals to get involved and to enhance their own lives and the lives of those whom they serve.

We are aware that the Scottish Executive will soon publish its strategy on the social economy, to which the voluntary sector contributes in considerable measure. The sector contributes to the implementation of Government programmes in specific areas as well as influencing policy processes. The relationships between the Scottish Executive's departments, local government and the voluntary sector, of which there are many different permutations, are critically important to the development of strategic thinking, policy and service delivery.

Although it is important to consider specific voluntary sector issues, it is also vital that voluntary sector services and engagement are part of mainstream thinking and delivery in areas that are clearly identified. That involves different funding methods, so the processes, funding mechanisms and the availability of funding must

be clear.

The Scottish Executive's social justice milestones will be achieved with considerable input from the voluntary sector. For example, the sector will be involved in providing employment training for young people, tackling homelessness, community regeneration, accommodation provision for those who have mental health problems and increasing the number of people throughout all communities who take part in voluntary activities—that list is in no way exhaustive.

The voluntary sector can offer people many opportunities to engage with Scottish society. However, given the costs that are involved, it is important that the Scottish Executive and local government are aware of the constraints that are placed on voluntary organisations, which must be accountable and which must meet externally set standards. Organisations must meet both the costs of compliance and the costs of involving users and volunteers. For example, Scotland is a multicultural society and translation services should be made available in order to ensure that people from minority ethnic communities can participate in the sector. Travel and subsistence must be paid in order to ensure that people on low incomes can become involved. Transport and access must be considered in order to ensure that people with disabilities have equal opportunities. Those issues carry costs, in the same way as the implementation of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 will add costs to the provision of services.

There must be a recognition of those costs in the provision of grants. Voluntary organisations themselves must also ensure that those issues are considered. The voluntary sector must be willing and able to meet agreed standards, but if the strategy for involving the sector is to have a longer-term benefit, it must include the financing of policy shifts.

Our submission highlights the key issues and we can discuss further those that are of most concern. Over the next three years, the active communities forum will evaluate the work that has been undertaken as a result of the direct funding from the active communities initiative. The forum will also take into account the way in which the voluntary sector and volunteers have been involved in meeting the strategy's objectives and the social justice milestones.

Volunteers play a key part in society. Their efforts and contribution are in some respects incalculable and must be recognised and valued. The voluntary sector should be considered as one of a number of players that provide considerable added value in developing and serving the community in Scotland. The sector is

complementary to, not a replacement for, public services. It is not a way of offering services on the cheap.

12:15

Claire Stevens (Active Communities Forum):

The third objective of the active communities initiative was to broaden the range of people who are involved in volunteering and community action. That objective is integral to the wider social justice agenda and is based on the important principle that everyone, whatever their background or circumstances, should have the opportunity to contribute to and participate in their community.

The committee has already heard this morning about people who find it difficult to get involved in volunteering: people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic communities, housebound and other physically isolated people, offenders, people on low incomes, young people and older people. Far too many people are pigeonholed as being the receivers of help rather than as people who have something to give.

For example, there is a lot of age discrimination in volunteering: people can be too young or too old to volunteer. My organisation shares the view of Age Concern Scotland—which Maureen O'Neill represents—that older people are a tremendous resource in a fast-aging population. Older people have a lifetime of experience and expertise that communities should be able to use. With the Executive's support, Community Service Volunteers Scotland is developing a retired and senior volunteering programme that will allow communities to tap into what older people have to offer.

The active communities forum emphasises that socially inclusive volunteering—if we may call it that—often provides the individuals concerned with enormous personal benefits, such as the development or realisation of their own potential. Volunteering can also provide people with new social networks or allow them to take new directions in learning or employment. There is strong evidence that volunteering is good for people's mental and physical health, because it helps people to stay active and socially engaged.

The importance of the personal benefits and motivations of volunteering cannot be emphasised enough. What individual volunteers get out of the experience is an important end in itself. Their enjoyment of the experience is a crucial factor in their continued involvement. Most people do not volunteer to take forward Government policy; they are involved because they want to put something back into the community, or because they want a worthwhile experience.

Let me briefly illustrate that from the work of my

organisation. Community Service Volunteers Scotland is a national charity that provides people with a wide range of opportunities for volunteering and community involvement. We have always operated a non-rejection policy, which has resulted in our frequently working with some very excluded individuals, for whom mainstream volunteering and community involvement is simply not an option.

For example, we work in partnership with several local authorities throughout Scotland to support looked-after children and young people—in other words, young people who are in care or under supervision. Those young people are at the sharp end and have already experienced tremendous disadvantages in their lives. When they are referred to us, their self-confidence and self-esteem are at rock bottom. They are usually depressed and demoralised, have poor social skills and might have learning difficulties. One might think that they would not be star material for volunteering.

CSV's role is to provide such young persons with a volunteering experience that provides a pathway into something outside their normal environment. We provide something that will help them raise their own and others' expectations of themselves—to let them look above the parapet, as it were. Our aim is to provide a placement that will give them a sense of self-worth and motivation and which will help them to practise and develop basic skills. Above all, we aim to provide the young people with an opportunity for enjoyment, because if they do not find volunteering fun, they will not sustain it.

For some of those young people, their volunteering experience is a major life-changing event. It can unlock their potential and enable them to progress to more volunteering, or a training placement, or further education, or a job, or a tenancy of their own. However, other young people may travel a much smaller distance in their personal development. They may drop out quickly or never start, because their difficulties are so great. What is crucial is that they are at least given the opportunity to try.

As Maureen O'Neill emphasised earlier, the costs of ensuring that opportunities exist for such excluded individuals must be recognised. In the example that I have given, every volunteering placement must be designed for the individual young person, which requires a large amount of negotiation and discussion. Once our young person is placed with an organisation or community group, it is crucial that the young person is supported. The young people need to feel valued and secure if they are to be able to sustain the placement.

Even with the right resources—we have heard a

lot about those this morning—success might not be recognisable in conventional terms. Some risk is involved. Projects might develop much more slowly and there might be a higher drop-out rate of volunteers, which can have a knock-on effect on services and funding and contractual obligations. It must be emphasised that success may be measured not in the number of volunteers, nor in the number of hours given, but in the quality of the experience that the individual volunteer has.

The active communities initiative has an important role to play. It is already helping to raise awareness of the importance of social inclusion and volunteering to individuals and communities and is helping to raise awareness of the complexity and costs of volunteering. The voluntary sector has an important role in social inclusion, because we have some of the greatest expertise of working with socially excluded groups. I hope that the work that is funded over the next three years under the Executive's active communities initiative will help us not only to develop further good practice but to pave the way for other funders and policy makers to support us in making socially inclusive volunteering more the norm.

Harriet Eadie (Active Communities Forum):

So that the committee can put me in context, let me say that I participate in the active communities forum as the convener of volunteer bureaux Scotland. Under that hat, I work locally with Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange, but I have also just started a part-time secondment to the Scottish Executive's voluntary issues unit to help roll out the new money to LVDAs under the active communities strategy. With those different hats, I am involved in a wide range of volunteering all over Scotland.

I want to expand a little on the spectrum of volunteering and community action that the active communities forum embraces. I want to have a bit of a look at the range of people involved and consider some of the barriers to involvement.

The volunteering continuum covers a huge range of actions that are carried out by a wide variety of people. According to the most recent Scottish household survey, 27 per cent of the population take part in volunteering. Levels of commitment and activity vary widely. A young person might work full time for several months in a formal scheme for community service volunteers. There is a huge but shrinking group of volunteers who give up several hours a week, sometimes for years, for activities such as befriending, telephone helplines and youth movements. There are also people who have a much more limited one-off involvement—rattling cans, helping out at fund-raisers or getting involved in team volunteering opportunities through the workplace, which is a

growing field of volunteering involvement. All of us could be volunteers. It is important not to pigeonhole a group of people that we see as volunteers.

The political profile of volunteering has grown considerably in the past few years. The Scottish Parliament's increasing recognition of the value of volunteering and its place in communities is welcome. However, there could be some areas of conflict in the new profile, which arise from the two different ways of looking at volunteering politically—as service delivery and as participation or active citizenship.

Volunteering for service provision is perhaps the more traditional way of looking at it. Volunteering is seen as providing direct services for community benefit in social care, education, and environmental and conservation work. Volunteering is still broadly perceived by the public as providing or enhancing services that it might otherwise be beyond the means of the state to provide. That is not necessarily my view, but it is a strong perception. The primary beneficiaries of such volunteering are most likely to be perceived as the clients or service users for whom the service is provided.

The second concept, which is becoming more prevalent, sees volunteering as involving participation or active citizenship. The activities that people are involved in under both those headings are frequently the same as for service provision volunteering, but the focus is on the involvement of the individual volunteer rather than on the service that the volunteer provides. It is about participation and volunteering by socially excluded groups, people with disabilities or mental health problems, and people from black and minority ethnic communities. It includes many of the peer interest groups in volunteering, such as self-help groups and sports and arts clubs. It also embraces a lot of local community activism. It has a powerful effect on individuals and communities, as individuals become empowered to make changes in their own lives and communities.

There is a huge overlap in both concepts. Much of the current political rhetoric is about participation, but much of the practice on the ground is about service delivery. The conflict is that service providers—whether they are voluntary organisations or statutory health and social services—are driven by a need for outcomes and targets that do not necessarily take into account the participation value of volunteering. There are barriers of legislation, attitude and prejudice, which still get in the way.

I shall give a few examples of what I mean by legislative barriers. An Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange volunteer with a past history of mental health problems wanted to work in the garden of

an activity centre for children with disabilities. He is supported by a specialist worker at a project at the Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange. The manager of the centre has interviewed and accepted him, he has gone through the criminal record checks process and his psychiatrist has provided a positive reference, so he has overcome quite a lot of hurdles already. He will have no direct, unsupervised contact with the children at the centre, but registration and inspection provisions in the Children Act 1989 prevent him from working there because of his past history of mental health problems. That is one of many parallel legislative examples.

On the target-driven barriers to volunteering, another example involves a volunteer with a learning disability who had been involved for years with a local charity shop that was part of one of the big national chains. He was liked and supported by the manager, but his capacity to carry out the required range of tasks was limited. A change of senior management at the shop required him to leave. The shop was pressured from above to meet financial fundraising targets. From the organisation's point of view, the primary beneficiary was a third world development programme and not the volunteer. Providing what was in effect a social care service for someone with a learning disability was not part of the shop's remit. That situation is replicated endlessly.

Like many agencies represented on the active communities forum, the network of volunteer bureaux is at the sharp end of challenging such barriers to participation. Our remit is about promoting involvement. Participation through volunteering must be recognised as an end in itself and not always as a means to an end. We appreciate that the Parliament has begun to recognise that by including the idea in one of the specific social justice milestones, but there is still much to be done to ensure that the ethos of participation can work across the range of service delivery agencies.

12:30

The Convener: Does the active communities forum have links with other United Kingdom groups that promote volunteering? Is there any evidence that Scotland is taking a different approach from the rest of the UK?

Maureen O'Neill: The forum has not been in existence for very long so we have not made contacts at that level, but among the representatives on the forum, the answer is yes. There is a wide spectrum of different interests and there are links with the Scottish Parliament and the Executive, as well as with organisations down south and in other parts of the UK.

The Convener: Will you say something more about how the Scottish compact works in practice? Are there areas that need to be developed or improved?

Maureen O'Neill: The general view of the compact is that it has made some difference. Today we have heard about issues that need to be worked on further. Compacts need to develop over time and it is important that some of the principles of the Scottish compact are reflected in local government. Some local authorities have already introduced compacts—I know about Edinburgh, for example.

There are still difficulties on both sides about how to operate the compact effectively and what its role is. Sometimes there is confusion that a compact is a way of consulting rather than a way of seeing how the relationship works. The relationship is the key part of any compact.

Mr Gibson: Section 2 of your submission talks about the key aims of the strategy. What are the main challenges to be faced in meeting those aims?

Maureen O'Neill: The forum includes people who were part of developing the strategy and those of us who came in after that. As mentioned in the submission and in my previous remarks, the difficulty is the diversity of the voluntary sector. How can the changes effected across 44,000 groups be monitored meaningfully? Our challenge is to find a way to evaluate how effective we are in bringing about change. We need to consider measures that support the desired changes by parcelling them up and considering them over a period of years.

Some of the quantitative work will be relatively easy, but it will be difficult to measure the qualitative input from voluntary organisations and the relationships between them and others.

Harriet Eadie: One of the significant challenges for me in implementing the forum's work is increasing the visibility of volunteering. Brian Magee touched on that briefly in relation to measuring the impact of what a volunteer does. Voluntary organisations are beginning to be measured more. They are tied into service-level agreements and contractual relationships, but volunteers are outside those formal contractual relationships and so are invisible. The input of volunteers at, for example, local government level is recognised when they become representatives on social inclusion partnership boards, but at the participative level—by which I mean the level at which thousands of people get involved in the spectrum of activities in their communities—little of that input is recognised. In addition, there is little recognition of the impact of that participation on the lives of the individuals. That is one of the

biggest challenges for the strategy.

Mr Gibson: It may be early days, but what progress has been made in achieving some of the key aims of the strategy?

Maureen O'Neill: There are several levels. The first is the commitment from the Scottish Executive to fund some of the key aspects that it feels are important. The infrastructure bodies—VDS, the LVDAs and the specific intermediary organisations—have been funded to push forward the key elements of the strategy for particular groups. That is one achievement. We also have to see what effect that has.

Secondly, we are beginning to draw together a framework within which the forum can work, so that we can work with the Scottish Executive and others to see, as Harriet Eadie said, what impact the four key elements of the strategy have over a period of time. In honesty, progress feels quite slow, but given the threads that have to be drawn together, the fact that the forum has existed formally only since February, and the fact that we are drawing people away from the work that they do to contribute, we have made not inconsiderable strides.

Robert Brown: You touched on the evaluation framework, which you say in your paper has been agreed. What does it involve? Does it involve tools or a monitored time scale?

Maureen O'Neill: It is being operated independently by a consultant. The framework includes examining the Scottish household survey to see what baseline information we have. It will involve meeting different organisations in different parts of the country to determine their awareness of the strategy, what local input there has been, and how people understand it.

We will also have to work with organisations that have had specific funding. The forum does not monitor those initiatives—that is not our role; our role is to examine the outputs and outcomes of the projects that have received funding. The challenge is how we draw in the plethora of information from small groups that make a considerable input to the running of initiatives that have had specific funding and from the voluntary sector in general.

Robert Brown: An issue was raised about the different groups, such as CVS Scotland, the SCVO, VDS, and now the active communities forum. To the outsider, the appearance is fractured. Do the public have a clear view of where they can go to get help and advice on volunteering? Is there an element of moving together to form a one-stop shop? Have you given any thought to those issues?

Maureen O'Neill: The challenge is how to bring so many groups together. There are different

functions. VDS and the LVDAs are to do with volunteering infrastructure. The SCVO provides a slightly different sectoral approach to the issues that affect management of the sector. There are different perspectives. I am sure that my colleagues will wish to comment.

Harriet Eadie: You referred to a one-stop shop. I know that the Executive has invested heavily in the SCVO's voluntary sector portal. One window of that, which has also had Executive investment, is the volunteer bureau network database of volunteering opportunities. Joe Public will be able to access the range of volunteering opportunities either through the local volunteer bureau or through the range of links and networks that the database creates. That is not to say that the opportunities belong to the volunteer bureau network. We are a conduit—a means of accessing many different things. I do not think that the public will know or care what the active communities forum is; they want to know where and how they can get involved. The important point is what comes out at grass roots.

Claire Stevens: There needs to be a diversity of routes into volunteering. Even Joe Public will not necessarily go along to the local volunteer bureau and ask to volunteer. Many of the people with whom my organisation works have initially contacted the local authority. The young person or the person with learning disabilities, for example, has not necessarily gone to the local volunteer bureau. One size does not fit all.

CSV Scotland is not an umbrella organisation. We are members of Volunteer Development Scotland, the SCVO, Age Concern Scotland and so on. That works well because in different areas of the country we work in partnership with the local CVS, the local volunteer bureau or Age Concern Scotland to develop new opportunities. As Harriet Eadie said, what Joe Public sees is not as vital as what the infrastructure does for service providers in the voluntary sector.

Mrs McIntosh: I have been fascinated by the different comments, particularly the distinction that Harriet Eadie made between participation and service delivery. In practice, how easy is it for community organisations to maintain their independence?

Harriet Eadie: In some respects, it is the level of community action that matters; it is easier for smaller local community groups to be independent. There is a stage in the middle of a volunteering organisation's growth where independence becomes more difficult. When an organisation is small and does not have paid staff—it is a local community group of activists and volunteers who want to be involved—it is empowered by its commitment and conviction to get something done and to effect change in the

community. When a group becomes a middle-sized voluntary organisation—

Mrs McIntosh: It reaches a critical mass.

Harriet Eadie: That is a common progression. A group seeks funding; it gets tied into a funding relationship and the regulations for a while. Chasing the funding is a skill that one has to learn, which, for smaller and middle-sized organisations, can be difficult. Once an organisation becomes bigger and develops a critical mass, it is much easier for it to project its voice, articulate its views and become, as Age Concern Scotland and VDS are, a representative voice that is a peer of the Government.

Mrs McIntosh: It becomes an organisation that has influence.

Harriet Eadie: Yes. That varies across the spectrum of organisations.

Maureen O'Neill: Evidence has illustrated that, when a voluntary organisation gets to the stage of delivering a continuing service, its independent status sometimes changes because of a service-level agreement with a local authority or a trust to provide that service. The voluntary organisation becomes bound by external standards and requirements that reduce its independence. Each voluntary organisation has to weigh up carefully whether that situation is appropriate for it.

12:45

Claire Stevens: We should also bear in mind the fact that not all voluntary organisations get Executive funding for their core business. CSV, for example, gets less than 1 per cent of its total income from Executive core funding—although we are grateful for that funding. However, most voluntary organisations, including CSV, have to be creative and imaginative in finding new sources of funding; sometimes an organisation has to consider moving on to such a new source. For example, my organisation—CSV Scotland—has funding from BT and the Deutsche Bank to help their employees develop the volunteering in schools that those companies support. CSV has the capacity to develop such initiatives because it is a large organisation.

The Executive cannot fund all voluntary organisations in the way that we would all like. Voluntary organisations are doing much imaginative and creative work to protect their independence by having portfolios of funding.

Karen Whitefield: How easy is it for organisations to sustain volunteering? On our Inverness visit, representatives told us that volunteer burn-out was a problem, because the same people were involved in committees that dealt with a range of issues.

Harriet Eadie: We hear an enormous amount of such evidence. People in small communities particularly get burned out, because they tend to wear many different hats. That partly results from a traditional way of regarding volunteering. The ACF's strategy, with which I agree, is that volunteering must be broadened to bring in a different, fresh set of people who do not see themselves as the typical committee volunteer. The strategy challenges local voluntary organisations to expand their breadth of vision.

At yesterday's conference, to which Norrie Murray referred, we discussed the capacity building that volunteer bureaux do with local voluntary organisations. That work involves not having a set image of whom they want to participate and involve in their work. The result is a much broader range of participants, which means that burn-out is less critical. There are also issues about support, management and involvement.

Karen Whitefield: The obvious key is extending volunteering opportunities. You say in your written submission that the benefits of volunteering for the volunteer must be understood. We would like disabled people to volunteer. How easy is it for such people to volunteer? Do volunteering opportunities for disabled people go unanswered because there are barriers that they cannot get over? If so, what can we do about that?

Maureen O'Neill: We have touched lightly on some of those barriers. There are issues about transport, access to buildings and attitude that we need to take into account. We must consider training and awareness raising in voluntary organisations, as we do for statutory bodies. However, I think that there are opportunities for disabled people to become volunteers.

Harriet Eadie: There are many opportunities, some of which are not taken up. The process is partly a matching one. A lot of work is being done on that. A third of the volunteer bureaux in Scotland have a specialist focus on including volunteers with disabilities, mental health problems or learning disabilities. For people with multiple disabilities, heavy investment is required for support, buddying, work shadowing or similar encouragement to get into volunteering. A huge contribution is already made. It is easy to lump people with disabilities into one group—I have an anxiety about that—but people with disabilities are already undertaking a vast amount of volunteering.

Claire Stevens: I support that, but another key thing is to get away from the idea that one size fits all and that people have to be slotted into mainstream volunteering opportunities. We have to work with people with severe disabilities to find out their interests and capacity and then to develop a tailor-made opportunity that will both suit their needs and contribute to the community.

Most people with disabilities are elderly people. Many very elderly people may be housebound or living in a nursing home or residential care. They may not get out much, if at all. CSV Scotland's retired and senior volunteer programme works with people in that situation. People do not have to be mobile and out and about rushing around in order to volunteer. There are other ways to volunteer, such as telephone befriending, for which people do not have to go anywhere. There are new, imaginative ways of using the internet and computers to help people to volunteer.

At a simple level, we have whole armies of elderly people in residential homes who knit trauma teddies, which are handed out to fire brigades to give to distressed children at fire scenes. Again, they can do that without going anywhere. There are real physical barriers in costs and transport, for example, but the question is above all one of attitude and of people in our sector being creative in developing the right opportunities. That is possible.

Maureen O'Neill: People with disabilities have led the field in changing the status quo and in community action. When we consider the views and input from minority communities, however we describe them, we see that it is often those communities who are making things change.

Cathie Craigie: I am conscious that time is short and so I will try to get my points into one question. In your submission, you mention the cost of inclusion, part of which concerns how communities are involved in the social inclusion agendas. Do you think that the Executive's consultations with voluntary sector organisations have been meaningful and that they have taken account of the views that have been expressed?

Some of the evidence that we have taken recently, as well as what Robert Brown and I heard during our visit to representatives of voluntary groups in Aberdeen, indicated the high cost of being involved in the consultation process and the considerable time that is taken up by that. Some organisations could devote almost 50 per cent of their time to involvement in consultation. To summarise, I would like to know your thoughts on the costs of having an inclusive agenda.

Maureen O'Neill: We appreciate the level of consultation that has taken place. That is important. The task sometimes seems overwhelming, but we have to be careful about the professional side of the voluntary sector providing the responses when the responses should be given by those who provide the voluntary help or by the users of services. Sometimes consultation can be expensive. There is a real cost in involving people so that they are up to speed with information and have felt included in the work of organisations. We can allow people to buddy up to

go to places, because it can sometimes be intimidating to go on one's own to a new forum and be expected to contribute. We have to consider the real costs that that involves. However, the long-term value of involving people who use services or who volunteer at all levels is absolutely critical.

Harriet Eadie: The active communities strategy consultation process was effective. There was a lot of input into broadening the strategy; for example, money was committed to volunteer bureaux to form focus groups with volunteers. As Maureen O'Neill pointed out, that aspect is critical. The consultation has to reach the end user or the person at whom it is aimed, which involves costs in time and commitment.

Linda Fabiani: My question perhaps runs on naturally from Cathie Craigie's question. We talked earlier about the sheer work involved in meeting all the targets and the changes and differences that that can make to an organisation. However, in your submission, under the heading "The costs of compliance", you note that "the emphasis of funders" is "on projects and innovation", which appears to cause a problem with meeting costs.

Another point came to mind when Maureen O'Neill talked about the number of paid staff in voluntary organisations who are seconded to the Executive or other organisations to inform the process. They represent added costs. Maureen O'Neill mentioned that the forum was taking people such as Claire Stevens and Harriet Eadie from their normal paid workplaces. Has there been any recognition of the fact that such costs could be affecting the services that the organisations are supposed to provide? Has there been any recompense apart from the recognition of the long-term value?

Maureen O'Neill: The important factor is time. There is no doubt that we want to provide the time and input. However, it takes a considerable time to respond as effectively as possible to all the papers and ideas that the different departments produce and that affect us in different ways. The dilemma is that, although we want to be part of the forum, our ability to help our clients could be affected if we are not working in our own organisations for considerable periods of time. We therefore need to find a balance.

The section on the costs of compliance in our submission raises issues such as how we can find the time to include our networks and the users of our services in our work and how we can improve the accessibility of information. For example, we could make such information available in different languages and in clearer language. However, those aspects incur further costs. The Executive, the community fund and others hardly ever mention such costs, which are not as clearly

recognised as they should be. As a result, we are saying that, although participation and user involvement are incredibly important, there is only so much money and the costs involved stretch funding. We need to watch the balance between including such aspects and acknowledging their real costs across the organisation.

Linda Fabiani: Has there been any financial recognition of the fact that services might be affected because, for example, you have been asked to take part in the forum or to sit on working groups in the Executive?

Maureen O'Neill: No. As witnesses have pointed out, we want to be at the table. However, although the expectation that we will be at the table is a benefit, there are associated costs.

Linda Fabiani: As far as I can see, paid staff always seem to be involved in the forums and working groups. However, I imagine that end users might feel resentment when they see the organisation's paid staff hobnobbing with various people all over the country instead of providing the services that they are paid to provide. That seems to be a contradiction.

Maureen O'Neill: The issue creates a tension. The voluntary sector should address the challenge and ensure that volunteers and end users have a chance to participate. However, as that involves a support cost in the first instance, we have to marry the issues.

13:00

Linda Fabiani: I have a quick question about investment, to which you refer in section 10 of your submission. You mention the balance that must be struck between investing in the local service deliverer and investing in the intermediary body that supports it. Has such a balance been struck or is there still some way to go towards meeting that aim?

Maureen O'Neill: I think that we still have some way to go. However, the active communities strategy starts from the position that we need to put the support structures in place before we can examine and support specific issues. Although we are beginning to put those structures in place, we must still ensure that we do not exclude support to a small local group that delivers real opportunities to volunteers.

The Convener: With that, I thank the witnesses for attending. I also thank them for their submissions, opening remarks and willingness to answer questions. If you wish to develop any further points with the committee, we will be only too happy to receive your comments.

Subordinate Legislation

Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (Registered Social Landlords) Order (SSI 2001/326)

The Convener: We will move into private session. [*Interruption.*] However, before we do so—and before the clerks have a collective heart attack—I have to move to the fourth item on the agenda, which is consideration of subordinate legislation. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (Registered Social Landlords) Order (SSI 2001/326), which has been made under the negative procedure, was sent to members on 2 October, and no comments have been received.

The order has been considered by the Subordinate Legislation Committee, extracts of whose report have been included in the briefing paper. The Subordinate Legislation Committee draws the attention of the Parliament and the lead committee to the order on the ground that confirmation was required that the enabling provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 would be commenced before the order came into force. No motions to annul have been lodged and no other action can be taken on the order.

If members have no comments, I have to put the question. Do we agree that the Social Justice Committee has no recommendation to make on the order?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: The lead committee will report by 12 November and the Parliament will deal with the order by 17 November. We now move into private session.

13:02

Meeting continued in private until 13:11.

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