

# **SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 12 December 2001  
(*Morning*)

Session 1

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# CONTENTS

Wednesday 12 December 2001

<b>ITEMS IN PRIVATE</b> .....	2721
<b>SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION</b> .....	2722
Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act 2001 (Prescribed Notice) Order 2001 (SSI 2001/419) .....	2722
<b>VOLUNTARY SECTOR INQUIRY</b> .....	2723
<b>SOCIAL JUSTICE ANNUAL REPORT 2001</b> .....	2742

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## SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

28<sup>th</sup> 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

Sheenagh Adams (Scottish Executive Development Department)

Ms Margaret Curran (Deputy Minister for Social Justice)

Linda Rosborough (Scottish Executive Development Department)

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lee Bridges

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mary Dinsdale

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Craig Harper

### LOCATION

Committee Room 3



## Scottish Parliament

### Social Justice Committee

*Wednesday 12 December 2001*

*(Morning)*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:01*]

### Items in Private

**The Convener (Johann Lamont):** Welcome to this meeting of the Social Justice Committee. Do members agree to take items 2, 4 and 5 in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Before we move into private session, Linda Fabiani would like to say something.

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** When I was reading the paperwork this morning, it dawned on me that I should place on record the fact that I have a flat that I rent out. It is not a house in multiple occupation, but it has the potential to be so. I declare that interest.

10:02

*Meeting continued in private.*

10:49

*Meeting adjourned.*

11:00

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** Before I take item 6, Robert Brown wishes to make a statement.

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** This is a minor matter, but about 15 years ago I paid £1 to become a member of Abbeyfield Rutherglen Society Ltd, which should be mentioned in the context of houses in multiple occupation.

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** Does the dividend go towards your office expenses?

**Robert Brown:** Absolutely.

## Subordinate Legislation

### Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act 2001 (Prescribed Notice) Order 2001 (SSI 2001/419)

**The Convener:** Item 6 is subordinate legislation. We have before us today a negative instrument—the Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act 2001 (Prescribed Notice) Order 2001 (SSI 2001/419). The order was sent to members on 15 November, and no comments have been received. It has been considered by the Subordinate Legislation Committee, which has not drawn the lead committee's attention to any aspects of the instrument. An extract of that committee's report is included in this committee's papers. No motion to annul has been lodged and no other action can be taken on the order. If no one has any comments, are we agreed that the Social Justice Committee has no recommendation to make on the Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act 2001 (Prescribed Notice) Order 2001 (SSI 2001/419)?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Voluntary Sector Inquiry

**The Convener:** We will move to item 4—I mean item 7; I always just read what is in front of me, which can make for interesting reading in the *Official Report*. In any case, the official reporters appear to be paying no attention whatever.

Item 7 is our inquiry into the voluntary sector. I welcome Margaret Curran, the Deputy Minister for Social Justice, and Scottish Executive officials Mark Batho, Sheenagh Adams and Linda Rosborough. We will have questions on the social justice annual report later, but we begin with the report on the voluntary sector. Do you wish to make some opening comments to the committee, minister?

**The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran):** It is nice to be back at the Social Justice Committee. I apologise for the fact that Iain Gray is not here this morning; he very much wanted to come. Anyone who knows him knows of his strong interest in and commitment to working with committees in the Parliament and his strong interest in the voluntary sector, about which he wanted to talk to the committee. Unfortunately, today is the cities review day in Glasgow—it was postponed previously—so Iain asked me to come to the committee. We consulted the clerk to ensure that that was in the committee's interest. I just wish to put on record the fact that Iain Gray very much wants to come to the Social Justice Committee at a future date and would welcome discussion with committee members. The fact that he is not here today is not an indication that he does not value the committee; a clash of diary dates prevented him from attending.

We have taken a great interest in the committee's inquiry and we welcome the opportunity to present the Executive's views on the importance of the voluntary sector in Scotland. Many members will be aware of the significance that we accord to the voluntary sector in Scotland and to its work in building community capacity and services.

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations estimates that there are about 44,000 voluntary organisations in Scotland, of which some 22,000 are charities. They range from large limited companies that employ staff and have a turnover in excess of £1 million to small, locally based groups with no constitution and limited resources. The sector employs about 100,000 people.

For the Executive, the sector is a key partner in policy development, service delivery and the development of community capacity. Members will be aware of the Scottish compact, which provides a framework for developing further the relationship

between the sector and the Executive. The Executive has made a commitment to modernise the legal and financial frameworks within which the voluntary sector operates and to support the development of the sector's infrastructure. We have completed the national network of local councils for voluntary service and, for the first time, we are funding the network in every local authority area in Scotland.

We recognise that special needs are significant, particularly those of the black and minority ethnic voluntary sector. We are conducting a review of funding for black and minority ethnic groups in the voluntary sector and, earlier this year, I announced that we would be providing BEMIS—the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland—with core funding of some £100,000 a year.

Our recognition of the importance of the sector was underlined at an away day at the end of October. Forty or so senior people from the Executive, non-departmental public bodies and the sector came together to discuss voluntary sector issues. Three Scottish Executive ministers and Sir Muir Russell, the permanent secretary, also attended. The event was worth while, with a lot of good thinking and lively discussion. Our main aim is now to capture that thinking and to take forward the issues that were raised.

I draw members' attention to the funding that we give to the sector. Members may be aware of the amount that we give and I am happy to discuss the details. I know that we are pressed for time, so I will move quickly on.

Members will know of our social economy review, which will be significant for our work. I know that we are short of time, convener. Are you happy for me to continue to rush through my statement?

**The Convener:** You are fine, minister.

**Ms Curran:** Stephen Maxwell from the SCVO is carrying out that review and will report to the minister later this month. The review will look at the contribution of the social economy to service provision and economic prosperity. It will also consider the actions that the Executive needs to take to increase that contribution.

I know that members are aware of the active communities initiative. The voluntary sector is not just about voluntary organisations; it is about the people who give up their own time to volunteer. About 27 per cent of Scots volunteer regularly. We are committed to increasing the number of people from all communities who take part in voluntary activities. Our active communities strategy has four principal objectives: bringing about more positive attitudes at all levels to volunteering and community action; locating volunteering and community action at the heart of policy and

practice; broadening the range of people involved; and increasing the number of people involved.

The Scottish Executive has backed up our commitment with funding to deliver on that strategy. This year, we are funding the active communities initiative to the tune of more than £1.7 million. That sum will increase next year and the year after that, which shows our commitment to achieving real change in the promotion of volunteering and active communities.

We argue that the voluntary sector is a key part of the Executive's work. Our commitment to the sector has been recognised, although we know that issues remain on which we must deliver. However, I stress that the sector is a core part of our work.

**The Convener:** We move on to questions. I will kick off. Changes have been made recently to the ministerial team that is responsible for social justice and the voluntary sector. Do you believe that, consequently, there may be changes in policy direction in relation to the voluntary sector? Will there be a review of what has been done so far, so that you can reflect on whether changes should be made?

**Ms Curran:** The early indications are that no changes will be made, as we are in the midst of beginning work on a number of issues, such as the investment that we have put into the sector's infrastructure and the review of the social economy. My view is that it would be appropriate for us to bed down that work, rather than change direction. Iain Gray has just taken up his post and he will take some time to consider his brief in detail. We have had considerable success in our work with the voluntary sector and we will take on board the First Minister's statement that there should be fewer initiatives and more delivery. Our work with the voluntary sector is in the delivery phase. Both the Parliament and the Executive have made a clear commitment to the voluntary sector and we are on target with a lot of our work.

**The Convener:** Do any of the Executive's policies on the voluntary sector need further development? Alternatively, if we do better when we do less, are there policies that should go? You spoke about volunteering. Volunteers come from different backgrounds. Are they more likely to come from more affluent areas? If so, has work been done to target other communities where there may be fewer volunteers?

**Ms Curran:** Since I have been a minister, we have tried to keep our work with the voluntary sector strategic and focused. Infrastructure funding may not always grab the headlines—it is not the most populist of measures—but it is undoubtedly required. Everyone in the sector would agree that it must be prioritised properly.

We will continue to do that because we expect to see results.

We await the outcomes of the funding review and the social economy review. That will be the time to consider future strategic priorities. The question is not one of dropping things; we are not yet at a stage where we can say that some things are fundamentally wrong. I argue that we need to keep our focus.

I have strong sympathy with your point about the need to target certain communities. The volunteering community is sometimes unfairly represented by the sexist description "twinset and pearls". That is inappropriate and can be insulting to a number of people who volunteer. However, I accept the point that underlies your question. The most excluded communities perhaps do not get the chance to volunteer in ways that they may have had in the past. For example, much work has been done to encourage foster-parenting in ordinary communities. We want to encourage that. One of the key elements of the active community strategy is to ensure that a broad range of opportunities is available for people across all sections of society. We firmly believe that the most inspiring people may be in the most excluded communities. Against all odds, they get out there and make an enormous contribution to their communities. We value that and we want to support and encourage it.

**The Convener:** Are moneys in the active communities budget targeted on that?

**Ms Curran:** Yes.

**The Convener:** Is the Scottish Executive development department accountable for it?

**Ms Curran:** Yes. I will let Sheenagh Adams give members some details; she may know the statistics better than I do.

**Sheenagh Adams (Scottish Executive Development Department):** Most of our information on levels of volunteering in different communities comes from the Scottish household survey. Later this month, we will publish a more detailed analysis than has been available. The highest levels of volunteering are in rural communities rather than in the large cities. Smaller towns come in between. People who are self-employed are most likely to volunteer: 35 per cent of self-employed people volunteer as opposed to 27 per cent generally and 16 or 17 per cent of unemployed people.

We are targeting resources to try to give people who are not volunteering more opportunities to do so. Under the active communities initiative, we are funding special programmes for older people, such as the Community Service Volunteers Scotland retired and senior volunteers project. CSV

Scotland is doing a wide range of things and expanding its work. We also have the millennium volunteers programme for younger people, which has been specifically targeted at people who might have been regarded as socially excluded.

This year, we are starting a new project for housebound people. It is being piloted in the Borders and involves the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, Dark Horse Venture (Scotland) and Age Concern Scotland. The joint programme involves work with housebound people in the community and in old people's homes. We also have a project with Lead Scotland to address volunteering for disabled people. Volunteer Development Scotland is doing special work with black and minority ethnic volunteering.

We hope to expand and to target future resources on those areas. The active communities forum is considering that as part of its evaluation of the active communities initiative.

**Linda Fabiani:** The SCVO was clear in its evidence that, since devolution, engagement with Government had vastly improved. However, it still believed that some groups felt a bit marginalised—environmental voluntary groups in particular. Now that the groundwork on the voluntary sector seems to have been done, do you have plans to engage more fully with groups that feel marginalised?

11:15

**Ms Curran:** The SCVO has said that to us. I am pleased that it recognises that progress has been made, but we agree that more work must be done. Part of the thinking behind the away day in October that I mentioned was to have more of the Executive signed up. The presence of senior civil servants at the away day was welcome. Several detailed discussions were held between key voluntary organisations and those civil servants. Three ministers were present, which was also progress. That was a step in the right direction.

A recommendation from the away day was that we could facilitate joint meetings between key voluntary organisations and ministers. Some portfolios are further away from such strategic discussions with the voluntary sector, which come more naturally to social justice ministers than to others. That recommendation will go to the Scottish Executive/voluntary sector forum—I am trying to get the names right—which was due to meet today. That meeting was cancelled because of this committee's meeting, which takes priority. I think that the forum will meet in January. We have done and will do our best to have conversations with our colleagues throughout the Executive to engage them in that process.

The SCVO would say that political leadership is undoubtedly needed to drive and forge such an

understanding, and we agree. We have tried to create an environment in which there is an incentive for discussion with the voluntary sector and in which discussions on health, the environment and other matters provide a return. Those discussions are about not only service delivery, but policy.

Sometimes, as soon as the SCVO gets one thing, it moves on to the next thing that it wants—but I suppose that that is natural. The SCVO has a point.

**Linda Fabiani:** Perhaps the social economy review will pull some of that together.

**Ms Curran:** Yes. We are a bit further down the road on that than we may be on other issues.

**Linda Fabiani:** Many groups have said that they feel that their relationships with the Executive are better than their relationships with local government. Has a shift towards direct funding been considered? Voluntary groups would probably consider that ideal. In the absence of that, has the Executive thought about ways of assisting local relationships between local government and voluntary organisations?

**Ms Curran:** As you know, that is a huge issue, which crops up in our work a lot. You will understand that huge tensions and sensitivities are involved. We do not expect the Executive to substitute for local government. It would be inappropriate for us to take over local government's role. As you will know from our many debates on local government, we believe that we need to give local government its proper place in designing local services; local government must have authority in designing strategies that meet their areas' needs. It would be inappropriate for the Scottish Executive to intervene in that and we do not see ourselves doing so.

We realise that issues are being raised. We want to facilitate and encourage more constructive working relationships wherever possible. I am sure that Linda Fabiani knows that there are many constructive working relationships and positive developments between local authorities and the voluntary sector.

We encourage the development of local compacts. A forum between the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the voluntary sector is being developed. Sheenagh Adams will have the details of that, but I know that Iain Gray has just written to Corrie McChord, COSLA's representative who deals with the voluntary sector, because we need constructive dialogue about encouraging better working relationships with the voluntary sector.

**Sheenagh Adams:** COSLA has a voluntary sector forum that brings together the relevant



people from local authorities. We attend that, as do the SCVO and Volunteer Development Scotland. As Margaret Curran said, we and other interested parties will meet Corrie McChord. We will consider local compacts through the compact review group, which involves the Scottish Executive and the voluntary sector working jointly. We will invite local government's view.

Good examples of local compacts and local relationships exist. For example, in January I will speak to the Highland Council committee that is responsible for social justice about some of those issues. As Margaret Curran said, there are good and bad examples. Many local authorities have volunteering policies and have worked with Volunteer Development Scotland on developing them, but more must be done in some areas.

**The Convener:** I presume that the Executive has a process by which it speaks to local authorities that are not members of COSLA.

**Sheenagh Adams:** Our main emphasis is on dealing with COSLA, although we meet organisations that we fund and that are in areas where the local authority is not a member of COSLA. We have not had meetings with local authorities that are not in COSLA.

**Mr Gibson:** Will you do something about that shortly, given that Glasgow City Council, which is the largest local authority, is not in COSLA?

**Ms Curran:** I am in regular dialogue with Glasgow City Council about many matters; adding the voluntary sector would not create issues. We must consider that.

**Mr Gibson:** The SCVO criticised the voluntary issues unit's recent consultation on Government funding for the sector because of its limited scope and failure to consider strategic issues. How will the Executive tackle those concerns?

**Ms Curran:** We are not trying to run away from a consultation on strategic issues—we intend to have one. One of the issues is how the consultation is done. Again, Sheenagh Adams deals with the substance of that and can give you the details. Essentially, we are considering the funding in two key parts. First, we have gone on to a three-year cycle, which gives local authorities the opportunity to develop a more substantial relationship with the voluntary sector. Longer-term funding allows us to get away from projectitis; that is one of our key aims.

The other stage of getting our house in order is to tidy up the administrative process. The Executive sometimes causes difficulties because the way in which it does things is over-bureaucratic and leads to different forms for different systems. Some of our work has been on that process.

As part of the consultation, we asked for comments about a wider strategic review, which we will now move to. Not much has come back on that as yet—Sheenagh Adams is more familiar with the responses. We want a wider strategic discussion because grants are not the only issue. I believe that the SCVO is signed up with us on that. We want to move away from the debate on grants to one about the strategic relationship across the Executive, which involves, for example, the £304 million of indirect funding, the health boards and Communities Scotland. We want that to be rolled out in the next phase. Do members want the details from Sheenagh Adams?

**Sheenagh Adams:** The minister has covered the issues well.

**Ms Curran:** Hooray.

**Mr Gibson:** Give that girl a coconut.

**Sheenagh Adams:** As the minister said, the review is process driven. The SCVO is involved and a senior member of its staff is in the group that implements the review. We hope to make good progress on that. Next year, we will pilot a new approach to applications and offers, which will apply throughout the Executive by 2003-04. It is important that we get the processes right. A big criticism of the sector is the cost for organisations of applying for and dealing with funding. We want to streamline systems throughout the Executive. If we cannot become exemplars of good practice, we should not take a view on how other funders deliver the goods to the sector.

As the minister said, we asked for issues for a wider review to be identified and we received around 300 responses, which are being analysed. We will move on to a wider review, but it cannot be done in a short period. The system in the Executive is complex, but it is more complex when one takes account of indirect funding—the £304 million that the minister mentioned. Our aim is to make steady progress.

**Mr Gibson:** Last Friday, Robert Brown and I attended a meeting of Communities Against Poverty at which a couple of related issues were raised. First, disadvantaged groups that are non-geographically defined, such as the elderly and disabled, can lose out on geographically based initiatives such as social inclusion partnerships. Secondly, gentrification can impact on an area's eligibility for funding, which can adversely affect disadvantaged people in that area. For example, it was mentioned at the meeting that the west end of Glasgow is moving deeper into Maryhill. How flexible is the system in addressing those issues?

**Ms Curran:** I am not sure how flexible the system is. Perhaps it is not flexible enough. However, I would defend the geographic approach, despite its limits, some of which we

have addressed. In essence, the targeting of SIPs is about targeting excluded areas—it is part of a strategy of tackling poverty. We know about area-based concentration of poverty, which cannot be ducked. I am not saying that certain thematic groups should not be able to apply for funding. There are elderly people in Maryhill and Easterhouse, for example, which are covered by SIPs. Those people should be able to apply for funding.

**Mr Gibson:** I want to clarify something on gentrification. New housing may be built in a SIP area and people will therefore move into that area. If there is a reassessment and the area does not qualify as a SIP area, the people who originally lived in the community may lose out on support from the Executive. In naked statistical terms, the area has improved, but the quality of life and standard of living of the original community may not have improved.

**Ms Curran:** I take your point. We give great consideration to such matters and consider the statistics that are returned to us to designate boundaries and target resources. There is a constant discussion. There must be a balance. Boundaries cannot be changed constantly as, if they were, funding packages would be changed annually, which would not make sense. However, we are sensitive to the issue.

A few years ago, we introduced thematic SIPs partly in recognition of that issue. People experience disadvantage in different ways. For example, black and ethnic minority people have a particular disadvantage that other sections of the community do not have, which is why there is a particular SIP for them. There is the care leaver SIP—called Big Step, I think—which is a way of targeting a key section of the community that needs extra resources and which should be targeted separately.

I understand your point—we know that what you describe has happened in Glasgow, for example—but perhaps it has not happened to the extent that we need to tear up the geographic areas and make a new start. We still have a lot of work to do to create the mixed communities that we want. Perhaps communities are not as mixed as they should be and too many communities have been excluded areas for too long. We still think that the policy is appropriate, but we do not wish to exclude key target groups such as the elderly, who should be encouraged to make use of resources that are available to them locally.

**Robert Brown:** It has been said that, as far as we can judge, there is broad satisfaction with central Government. However, most voluntary organisations, as opposed to umbrella groups, receive their funding from local government. Although there has been a real-terms increase in

local authority funding in the three-year funding cycle, there is scant evidence that that is being followed up with three-year agreements and cost of living increases for local government-funded voluntary groups. What drivers does the Scottish Executive have to bring such things about? The issue is crucial if proper changes in existing core funding are to be made.

**Ms Curran:** From talking informally to members, I am aware of the committee's evidence and criticisms that have been made. I refer to my earlier answer. We understand the frustrations out there. We hear and understand the evidence. A much better working relationship between local authorities and the voluntary sector must be created. I also hear representations from local authorities that think that they are hard done by and that the voluntary sector does very well. Local authority workers have suffered considerably over the past 18 years. I am not trying to get too awkward about this, Lyndsay McIntosh.

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con):** Careful.

**Ms Curran:** It is only now that the effect of the increased funding in the local authority sector and policies that support local authority services is beginning to be felt. We are trying to change the culture of neglect—that should lead to a more constructive dialogue about issues such as service delivery.

Interesting work is going on in the community care sector, where the boundaries are not as sharp between what is provided by a local authority, the health sector and the voluntary sector. I am not saying that it is perfect, but there is an interface. We must encourage such dialogue. It would not be appropriate for the Scottish Executive to be heavy handed with the local authorities and to instruct them or fund them directly, as some organisations want us to. I understand the reasoning behind that, but we do not regard local government as an arm of the Executive that does our bidding.

11:30

**Robert Brown:** I accept that entirely and it is an important point. Nevertheless, the reality is that that is not happening to anything like the extent that it should. Is that partly because local authorities are not providing strategic drivers? An awful lot of the projects require innovation and new projects are reinventing the wheel. The term of funding is often limited and the sources of funding, for example health boards, the lottery and so on, are often outwith local authority control. Could anything be done to put more substantial core funding into the pot—however you define it—and provide less funding for new projects that just replace existing ones? Could we have greater

control over the lottery, for example, to allow us to do something in that context?

**Ms Curran:** There is a lot in that. We will consider those issues when we move on to the next phase of the strategic review of funding. I am having preliminary discussions with some people about several possibilities; we are not yet at the stage of deciding on policy. I am responsible for some SIPs' work and am examining the agendas that they are producing. They want to get away from projectitis: you can fund so many projects that you lose control of the many projects that exist. A more strategic view is necessary. We are encouraging SIPs to be more strategic. We want to encourage sustainability in funding, so that people think in terms of three years, not one.

The proposals for community planning give us opportunities to get key stakeholders round the table to develop a more strategic vision for their communities. Locality budgeting is not yet as well developed as we want it to be, but it has given us an interesting insight into how to make use of the resources that are available locally. It is necessary to have partnership discussions with all the key agencies and for the voluntary sector and local authorities to work together to develop a strategic vision for their area.

Sheenagh Adams will answer some of the questions. She is more familiar with some of the day-to-day discussions.

**Sheenagh Adams:** The voluntary sector is involved in the community planning task force. The SCVO and Volunteer Development Scotland are involved in the main body and in the sub groups. The guidance that will be made available to local authorities on community planning will place strong emphasis on the need to engage the voluntary sector. One of the key priority tasks that has been given to councils for voluntary service throughout Scotland is to engage in the community planning process and to help the voluntary sector in each local authority area to engage in the processes so that it can work with the local authorities, health boards, LECs and so on in their area to address issues. The picture is mixed across Scotland. We cannot take a uniform approach, because circumstances are different and the shape of the voluntary sector may be different in each local authority area.

**Robert Brown:** Is there a lack of recognition that the voluntary sector has a legitimacy equal to that of local government and central Government? Could a mechanism be used to encourage that recognition? A mechanism exists by which Citizens Advice Scotland gets money from the Department of Trade and Industry to lever in funding for partnership and development, against the background of matters such as training in management, which has been shown to be an

under-resourced element. Is there potential for a central funding mechanism like that, which would oil the wheels and encourage the process in a certain direction, while leaving local authorities with the principal role in strategy and funding?

**Ms Curran:** I do not know—I would not rule anything out as a possible way forward to tackle those issues. I do not think that anybody would rule anything out. In the context of my earlier comments, that would obviously be a matter for consideration.

On your comment about ministers not recognising the voluntary sector as one of the key partners, as I said in response to Linda Fabiani's question, that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to tackle the issue and fundamentally alter perceptions of the legitimacy of the voluntary sector. Volunteering is not just some nice, cosy kind of thing. We have worked hard to alter prejudices about the wider voluntary sector so that people grasp that the voluntary sector can bring innovation in the services that it provides. The debate about the social economy should begin to bring us into that discussion as well.

Some of the debate about voluntary sector funding is taking a slightly different shape from that of our conversation so far. An interesting debate is taking place about loans and equity from Social Investment Scotland. That is really beginning to bite in some parts of the voluntary sector. Some of our officials have studied models from elsewhere that give an interesting progressive way of taking forward some of those issues. We need to realise and make much more of the strength and capital that exists. We need to think a wee bit outside our existing parameters to start solving some of those problems because there are some quite radical options down the road. However, I take your point and I would not necessarily rule anything out.

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** You have already spoken about the need to promote volunteering and encourage more people to volunteer, which is welcome. However, one of the consequences of the active communities initiative is that not only do we need to encourage people to volunteer, we need to sustain, maintain and manage them too. Often when organisations put together funding applications, no consideration is given to the cost of managing those volunteers. We have taken evidence on that from VDS and from other organisations as we have gone around the country. Does the Scottish Executive share that view? Do you realise and accept that the problem exists? How will you address it?

**Ms Curran:** Yes, we view that issue as serious—it has been raised with us too. We are working towards producing best-practice guidance on that. People think that volunteering is a cheap

option, but it is not. Volunteering involves a completely different approach from simply trying to get things on the cheap. We recognise that there are management issues.

Now, I am trying to remember the name of the organisation that applied for funding. Is it the voluntary sector managers—?

**Sheenagh Adams:** It is the Scottish Association of Volunteer Managers.

**The Convener:** We should get the Executive to produce a glossary of all the organisations, groups and working groups.

**Ms Curran:** Then I could learn them off by heart. I apologise for not knowing the name of that organisation, but I knew that it existed—which for me is progress. Strike that from the record, please. *[Laughter.]*

Because we want to deal with those issues, we are considering whether to agree to that group's funding application, although I do not think that a decision has yet been made.

**Sheenagh Adams:** We have a meeting with the association next week.

**Ms Curran:** I take seriously the point that Karen Whitefield makes. From experience of volunteer projects, I understand what can go seriously wrong if management structures are not in place. Management may not be the most popular thing to fund, as people always want to fund core delivery, but we recognise that core delivery will not be right unless the management is also right. We are examining that issue and we will provide the committee with information on it.

**Sheenagh Adams:** From next year, the Executive will double the funding to the national network of local volunteer development agencies, which will get an extra £1 million under the active communities initiative. We know that some of those agencies are considering using some of that money to fund best practice because they recognise that, where things such as travel and subsistence costs need to be met, people must not be excluded because, for example, they cannot afford to pay their bus fare.

We also recognise that particular volunteers have special needs. At a recent voluntary development conference, the then Minister for Social Justice, Jackie Baillie, spoke about the various special needs that volunteers can have and committed the Executive to providing some money for pilot schemes. For example, help on personal development plans could be given to people with mental health problems who want to volunteer. Such people would then be able to build up and gain from their volunteering experience. Also, any financial costs that such volunteers might incur could be met.

**Karen Whitefield:** The sector is becoming increasingly professional. Volunteers are not ladies who lunch filling their time but individuals meeting a real need in their communities.

The increasing regulation of the sector has been raised with the committee. There are concerns that we need to get the right balance. There is an understandable need for regulation, particularly in relation to care, but we must ensure that that does not deter volunteers. Is the Executive aware of that concern? Are you doing any work on the consequences of increased regulation for volunteering? Are you examining whether it hits disadvantaged or socially excluded communities more? Do they have the experience or are they being given additional support to help them to deal with the necessary regulation? Does the Executive plan to do work on that and to monitor the consequences of new legislation that impacts on the sector?

**Ms Curran:** I was trying to discuss answers with my officials as you were speaking. It is hard to get the balance right. People who want to participate in their community and cannot understand why they are faced with such rules and regulations need support. It is important that people who give their time are assisted to understand why there are so many regulations.

A balance is obviously necessary. The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 is the best example. Working with children is another. I know that the committee went through a debate about Scottish Criminal Record Office checks. We need to have certain regulation in place because society tells us that we must protect and have mechanisms for protection. On the other hand, we want to encourage volunteering. You are right that a balance must be struck. It will never be perfect. We will never get the balance absolutely right, but we must always strive to achieve it.

The Scottish compact allows us to policy-proof. We want to ensure that, when pieces of legislation or policies are drawn up, those who draw them up keep the voluntary sector in mind. Often, the interests of professionals are understood, represented and established in certain policies but those of volunteers and the voluntary sector are not. The compact allows us to keep the interests of the voluntary sector in mind and to monitor it. We are alert to that. Bear in mind that we always have to think about that, because it is not easy.

I take your point about disadvantaged communities. I think that we understand exclusion and that volunteering in that context can be more difficult, as the volunteer or the people around them have no experience of, for example, working in a school. It is necessary to put in place the proper support systems.

That connects with your earlier question in many ways. Good management is about ensuring that support and information are in place. We are sensitive to ensuring that we properly value volunteers and what they can contribute rather than getting lost in the morass of bureaucracy.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** You spoke earlier about the Executive's wish to get the infrastructure of the voluntary sector right. I am sure that the committee agrees that that is important. During the inquiry, the committee has taken evidence from some organisations that feel that there is confusion about the roles of the different national infrastructure bodies. Do you think that the roles of the various Scotland-wide organisations are clear enough? Are you convinced that the current infrastructure is effective enough in meeting their requirements?

**Ms Curran:** We do not want confusion to exist. We must examine the roles of the national infrastructure organisations, because we need to make them clear. We are at the beginning of the process. We are just getting to the stage at which we are funding the national networks in every local authority area. Perhaps, once the situation beds down, there will be greater clarity.

We see a distinction between our support for voluntary organisations and support for volunteering, in which we support individuals. That point is linked to one that was made by Karen Whitefield. We do not want to see a professionalised voluntary sector—one that solely employs people. That would undermine some of the essential worth of volunteering to itself, the Executive and society. That said, we continue to see value in the big voluntary sector organisations and in the impact that they can make. That is why we fund volunteering as we do. We want to put in support mechanisms at levels that are appropriate for the individual volunteer or for small or large voluntary organisations. I hope that greater clarity will emerge as those systems bed down.

11:45

**Sheenagh Adams:** That is right. We fund the two national networks—CVS Scotland, which is geared up to providing a service to the wider voluntary sector—whether that be national organisations that operate locally or small, local organisations—and the local volunteering development agencies. We are aware that those names can create confusion—one can look at the name of a voluntary organisation and wonder whether it is a CVS or an LVDA. The LVDAs are behind the CVSs in having a brand identity. We have been helping them to develop a national identity as the volunteer bureaux—or whatever name it is that they decide to go with—across

Scotland. That will clarify the situation and make it easier for the LVDAs to advertise and so forth.

We have been asked why we do not merge the two networks—why do we fund two separate strands? Our view is that our commitment under the compact is to respect the independence of the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector decided to establish such an independent structure. It is not for us to say that it is wrong. We have to deal with things as we find them on the ground. We should then try to help the sector develop in the best possible way.

**Cathie Craigie:** I assume that that situation is on-going and that you want to highlight areas of duplication or confusion. Should the Executive or the sector publicise that role?

**Ms Curran:** It is for both the Executive and the sector to do that. In arriving at our support for the voluntary sector, we try to facilitate and encourage clarity from and access to the existing support networks. The sector has a responsibility to do that. We are in a new phase of support where we are damned if we do and damned if we don't. People can say to us, "We want this sort of network and this is how it needs to be developed."

One possible way to respond to that might be to create a degree of overlap, which might cause confusion. However, there will be less confusion as the situation settles. We are always open to suggestions from the sector and to its saying that it is time for change. That is the sort of strategic relationship that we are trying to have. We want to have an open dialogue; the situation should not be set in stone forever. As I said in my opening remarks, now is the time to bed down initiatives, not to create more change. The latter would lead to greater frustration.

**Cathie Craigie:** I want to move on to some of the constructive criticisms that we have heard during the visits that we have made as part of our investigation. I met voluntary sector groups that welcomed the Executive affording them an involvement in consultation documents. They welcomed the opportunity to help shape the Executive's policies.

However, they criticised the fact that they have been flooded with consultation documents. Full-time staff in voluntary organisations need time to respond to consultation documents. Often, it is lack of time that prevents volunteers, who are the people who deliver the service, from becoming involved in consultation exercises.

We do not want to suggest that the Executive draw back from its good practice of involving the voluntary sector in developing policy. However, has the minister considered changing the process to make it more effective? That would allow volunteers to get involved.

**Ms Curran:** That is a big issue. Again, we are damned if we do and damned if we don't. We want to consult, but we realise that some organisations, particularly smaller ones, can find producing responses a difficult challenge.

It is easy to send out a document for consultation four weeks before it is published and ask people whether they like it. That has been a model for consultation in the past, but we are trying to get away from that, as we understand the frustration that it causes and, in any case, it does not produce much of a result. It is not in our interests to do a merely cosmetic consultation exercise; that defeats the purpose.

We are thinking about how people might be brought into policy making earlier. The SCVO is asking for people to be involved right at the beginning of the process and to be consulted systematically throughout it, instead of just having a three-page glossy document appear on their desk and being asked to submit a full reply for three weeks on Friday, for example, which can be a bit of a shock to the system. Organisations cannot sustain that. We are publishing good practice guidance on consultation in order to improve what is being done—I will let Sheenagh Adams cover the detail of that in a moment.

I recently discussed the subject with the Equal Opportunities Committee. We have been considering consultation a great deal in relation to the equality strategy, particularly with regard to women's issues. A pilot involving women's organisations is being undertaken in Fife. Many of the organisations are small and have found it particularly difficult to respond to the broad range of issues that the Executive has raised with them. A consultant is working on that and will come back to us to consider different methods and models of consultation, so that we can determine which are the most appropriate.

Sometimes, we can over-consult. Organisations may have no time left to do their work because they are so engaged in consultation. We need to give time and thought to devising proper consultation methods. The Fife pilot and our publishing of the good practice guide are intended to achieve that.

I have mentioned the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland. There are special arrangements for key groups. I think that the BEMIS consultation was fairly successful, in that the organisation felt quite signed up to the consultation process, but did not feel over-consulted. Is that right, Sheenagh?

**Sheenagh Adams:** There is already a good practice guide for consultation of the voluntary sector. Centrally, the Scottish Executive is developing good practice on consulting in general.

We are keen to involve people in designing good practice; we are keen on consulting on good practice. I think that we are being a bit more innovative. It is not just about sending out a document and waiting three weeks for the reply. We have already given a commitment to give people three months to respond. We gave more than four months for the black and ethnic minority consultation.

We have tried to engage people in the consultation process. In the case of the black and ethnic minority consultation, we funded the SCVO to carry out a series of consultation events to bring in small local groups from throughout Scotland. The SCVO is helping with the design of questions, so that people are not faced in future with an 80-page booklet and no clear idea of where to begin. It is a matter of helping people to gather their thoughts and to put forward good responses to the consultation exercise. A lot of progress is being made and we hope to continue that.

**The Convener:** From what I have picked up from voluntary organisations, it seems that, if there is good practice, it is not really working. Organisations feel that tokenism is involved—that is a persistent criticism. It is about not just the time that is allowed for the consultation process, but the resource that is put into it. The reason why women's organisations, in particular, cannot respond as much as they ought to is because they work in so many areas and are so focused on service delivery at the hardest edge.

The point about tokenism has another focus. At the recent Communities Against Poverty meeting in Glasgow, which Robert Brown attended, it was said that organisations get no feedback. When they make an input that is rejected, there is no explanation. Organisations feel that although the Executive might say, "We hear you," there is no evidence that it has heard them in the form of policy coming out at the other end of the process.

**Ms Curran:** That is an interesting point, which we would want to take on board. Members may be aware that a lot of criticism about that was expressed by women's organisations through the women in Scotland consultative forum. We have examined the issue thoroughly and are doing so again locally. I am not saying that we have got there and have devised the perfect consultation process, but the issue is on our agenda. I note the point about feedback not being given to organisations and will look to feed that into our work.

**Cathie Craigie:** I have a small point on consultation. The first group I met as part of the exercise was based in Aberdeen. The group was pleased to see Robert Brown and me and was grateful that we had taken the time to come and listen before forming our opinions. The group

recognised the difference in the Scottish Executive's approach since the Scottish Parliament was set up. It suggested that the ministerial team that deals with the voluntary sector should visit different areas regularly. We made visits to the eight parliamentary regions, which was fairly successful. One could divide the country into smaller units. Perhaps the Executive could go out regularly to speak to groups in the regions, who could bring their ideas to the table. It was a good suggestion.

**Mr Gibson:** It is important that the mountain goes to Mohammed and is seen to do so. I agree with almost everything that has been said on that. It is about not just consultation, but participation.

I welcome the minister's comments about early involvement. One of the issues that arose at the meeting in Perth—Lyndsay McIntosh and Cathie Craigie also attended that meeting—was the fact that the time scale is important and that three-month consultation should be the norm. It was clear that people felt that three to four weeks for consultation was entirely inappropriate. As the convener said, three or four weeks' consultation means that there is little difference between the consultation and the finished document. A 90-day consultation would produce proper feedback and people would feel more involved. That would be much more productive. Many organisations think that they do not have the time to respond to consultations in a few weeks and do not feel that their comments will be taken on board anyway.

**Ms Curran:** I take that point very seriously. It is clear that the committee feels strongly about it and I will raise it with Iain Gray. We will not solve the problem easily; I would not like to say that we would. It needs to be considered across the Executive—we consult on everything, as the committee knows. Cathie Craigie's suggestion that we go out to people and be prepared to discuss issues is helpful. That moves issues forward and we will build it into our approach.

## Social Justice Annual Report 2001

**The Convener:** We are a little behind time. I hope that members will bear that in mind when they ask questions. The Executive intends to make available a more detailed briefing in the new year, but there are some points on which we wanted to touch today.

**Ms Curran:** You stole my opening line. Why should I suffer alone in reading the statistical analyses? The committee should join in. There is a wealth of ability in the Scottish Executive. I have benefited enormously from the technical briefings that help us to understand the report. It might be beneficial to the committee to go through the briefings instead of arguing about how the figures are established and compared. Perhaps the committee could have a special informal session with the officials and the statisticians.

**The Convener:** If we took up that offer, we would also want to consider how to proceed. There is a difference between an informal briefing and public scrutiny of Executive activity. However, I think that I can speak for the committee when I say that we would welcome a briefing.

**Ms Curran:** I would not want to undermine the committee's formal scrutiny of the process. My point was about education. We could then move on to formal scrutiny.

**The Convener:** So you are saying that if we can reach your level of understanding, we will be able to ask you harder questions.

**Ms Curran:** Ouch.

**The Convener:** We have some general questions.

Have the results published in the 2000 and 2001 social justice annual reports led the Executive to change policies or programmes or to introduce new ones? How often does the joint ministerial committee on poverty meet? Have you been able to identify any policies that the Westminster Government has changed following representations by the Executive at those meetings?

12:00

**Ms Curran:** As you know, the social justice annual report was meant to put a focus on social justice policy and its implementation, to enable us to get detailed evidence of progress or lack of progress. Obviously, we are in only the early days of the publication's life and we want to make more progress with it.

One indicator that is not moving in the right direction and which concerns us is the number of 16 to 19-year-olds who are not in education. The report shows that that target group was not properly on anyone's agenda and was the subject of no agency's performance target. Since we identified the area as a cause for concern, we have put in place partnership working to try to have a range of people making an effort on that.

**Linda Rosborough (Scottish Executive Development Department):** We are working with the local enterprise company network and the careers companies on performance indicators. We are trying to get away from the old system, whereby people creamed off the people who were most ready for work. We are trying to ensure that people have targets that recognise the work that they do on the hardest-to-reach group. That is where the challenge lies, as the report shows.

**Ms Curran:** Another indicator that had not been noticed as much as it should have been is the number of children in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That area needs attention and we are working hard to obtain more data. I know that Glasgow City Council has committed £5 million to dealing with the matter.

**Linda Rosborough:** The Scottish Executive gave £5.3 million to authorities who were major users of temporary accommodation. Although we have not yet got figures for authorities' use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation for children, we know from our informal approaches to Glasgow City Council that, because it has put resources into preventing families from being placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, it has been able to cut the number of families in such accommodation from 50 to four. That happened because the social justice report included the issue as an indicator—it was a milestone.

**The Convener:** Is that money from the councils' budgets or has it come from the Executive?

**Linda Rosborough:** We gave the councils £5.3 million.

**The Convener:** Were they allowed to spend the money only on tackling that issue?

**Linda Rosborough:** The £5.3 million was given to local authorities only for that purpose.

**Ms Curran:** We allocated the money because we want to tackle the targets that we have set.

You asked about issues that have arisen as a result of the joint ministerial committee. The meetings relate to a raft of work and one of the initiatives has resulted in the partnerships against poverty, which try to work with a range of agencies to raise benefit uptake among older people. The Scottish Executive has been heavily involved in that work.

You asked what influence the Scottish Executive had had on UK policy. We have been heavily involved in the UK national action plan on poverty. That has resulted in interest in our social inclusion network, which involves discussions with relevant interest groups. Damian Killeen from the Poverty Alliance recently told me that he had been invited to London to discuss his involvement in the social inclusion network.

**The Convener:** You will be aware of Glasgow City Council's poverty trap campaign, which addresses the fact that the benefit system makes it uneconomical for people to take advantage of the Scottish Executive's good initiatives to encourage people into work. Glasgow City Council has lobbied hard on the matter. Has the Scottish Executive done likewise through the joint ministerial committee? Is it possible to ensure that the benefit of Scottish initiatives to support people into work is reinforced by work on the benefits system?

**Ms Curran:** One of the spin-offs from the joint ministerial group has been a series of bilateral meetings. Jackie Baillie had one recently with Alistair Darling and George Foulkes and Iain Gray has some in his diary. I would need to check whether the matter has come up. I recently discussed it with Jim Coleman, who has been leading the work at Glasgow City Council. There is a submission that I will take to Ian Perry from the City of Edinburgh Council, who has also been working on that. We have been talking to Glasgow City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council about how they are working through the social justice annual targets; as part of that they have been in discussion with Alistair Darling.

Fairly detailed discussions are going on now. There is still work to be done, but the issue is on the agenda and progress is being made.

**Linda Fabiani:** My question relates to the basis of reporting. The baseline years for the individual milestones range from 1996 to 1999. I cannot understand why there is not uniformity. If we take a specific individual milestone, for example child poverty, we find that the baseline has changed, even within the space of a year. In the 2000 report, the baseline was 1997-98, but in the 1999 documentation that was produced, the baseline was 1996-97. A cynic might say that that was just so the Executive could take advantage of a perceived drop in child poverty.

**Ms Curran:** Never. That is why we want the statisticians to have a discussion with members. I have been working my way through this and I can tell members that there are statistical explanations. I cannot say anything smart to clarify that. I want to talk about the different baseline figures, and then I will let Linda Rosborough talk through the technical issues.



We are trying to measure the impact that the devolved Parliament has had in certain areas. We have had the debate about distinguishing between the impact of the Westminster Government and that of the Scottish Executive many times in Parliament. We think that it is appropriate for the Executive to be held to account for the policies that we bring in, so we have tried to distinguish between the years since we took power and the years prior to that. That explains why certain figures relate to 1997.

**Linda Fabiani:** Why do you go back the way, if that is the rationale?

**Ms Curran:** Because 1996-97 is our first year, if I remember correctly. I will start and then let Linda Rosborough, who is more on top of the details, clarify. If we are considering the impact of the Westminster Government, the baseline is 1996-97; and if we are considering the impact of the devolved Administration, it is 1998-99.

**Linda Fabiani:** But you went back the other way—that is what I do not understand.

**Linda Rosborough:** The initial "Social Justice ...a Scotland where everyone matters" documents, which were published a couple of years ago, contained the suggestion that the baseline should simply be the most recent data that was available. The work on the milestones was done at a time when we had no data for many of the indicators; our understanding was fairly rudimentary. When we considered the matter in more detail the following year, the decision was taken that, for indicators that were essentially reserved—where the main policy levers were in the hands of the UK Government—we should look for indicators that had as their starting point the time when the UK Government came to power. In the devolved areas, the baseline should start when the Executive came to power. So, we are roughly aiming for 1997 for the reserved areas—

**Linda Fabiani:** But you go back to the Tory years for the indicator that I mentioned.

**Linda Rosborough:** No. In May 1997, when the Administration came to power, it inherited the 1996-97 position. That is the starting point. The UK Government uses exactly the same basis in "Opportunities for all: Tackling poverty and social exclusion". We use the same indicators.

**Linda Fabiani:** It is the changing midstream that I find difficult.

**The Convener:** As far as people's level of satisfaction with the response goes, I think that we have got as far as we are going to get with that one. I am sure that we will pursue it further later.

**Karen Whitefield:** Children and young people feature strongly in the social justice targets. I am interested to know what the Executive's definition

of a young person is, particularly because so many of the milestones relate to young people of varying ages. Is there a reason why there is no standard definition or age for a young person? Do you think that as a result of the First Minister's commitment to putting young people at the heart of Scottish Executive policy, considerable efforts will be made and emphasis will be placed on achieving some of the difficult milestones and targets that the Scottish Executive has set itself?

**Ms Curran:** There is an explanation for the different definitions of a young person. The definition relates to what the milestone is about. The reason why the milestone that targets young people leaving education refers to 16 to 19-year-olds is that that is where the gap in provision is. It is legal to smoke at age 16, so the young people whom we are targeting in the milestone that targets smoking are aged under-16.

The definition and age of a young person reflect the key target that we are trying to achieve. There is no point in monitoring smoking in the over-16s. The thinking behind the report is targeting problems where they start. That is broadly agreed to be an acceptable model for measurement.

Karen Whitefield made an interesting point about the increase in emphasis on children and young people. We strongly welcome that. In the report, we have tried to be honest about the areas in which we think that we are not making progress. There are some intractable problems, which have to be resolved. As I tried to say earlier, the report gives us an insight into some of the agencies and organisations that are not delivering and which need to deliver if we are going to achieve some of the targets.

The report says difficult things about schools, LECs and us in relation to some of the work that needs to be done. We acknowledge that we need to consider teenage pregnancies, smoking and underachievement at schools. We need to consider why certain children are leaving without qualifications and are falling off the edge of the system. We need to take that seriously, focus on it and deliver our targets. If there was a push from the centre to say that there needs to be more delivery and less aspiration, that would be useful for the social justice report.

**The Convener:** I invite Cathie Craigie to comment and remind her that we are running against the clock.

**Cathie Craigie:** I will be quick.

I look forward to the briefing session that the minister mentioned. One of the Executive's 10 social justice targets is:

"Achieve full employment in Scotland in the modern sense of opportunity for all".

Will the minister educate us this morning and tell us what that means?

**Ms Curran:** I might pass over to Linda to give a technical definition.

**Linda Fabiani:** I thought that Margaret Curran was referring to me.

**Ms Curran:** That might be a step too far in consensus politics; I meant Linda Rosborough.

The target reflects a changing economy and a changing work force. Full employment used to be measured according to the idea that someone was in a permanent job for a long time. The modern economy does not work like that. People shift jobs and come in and out of employment with much greater regularity. As I understand it, that can sometimes lead to the odd statistical blip, because there is greater movement within the system.

I will get marks out of 10 for that.

**Linda Rosborough:** My understanding is that, even when there is full employment in the modern sense, there will be a certain level of unemployment, because of the effect of people moving jobs in a modern economy.

**Ms Curran:** Fifty years ago, we would have measured unemployment slightly differently. We can talk about that at the statistical briefing as well.

**The Convener:** If jobs are there, but people are not taking them up, would you say that that is opportunity for all?

**Ms Curran:** That is an issue as well, but it is not what we are saying; we are saying that there is greater movement in people's employment record, so the unemployment rate shows differently. Economists will confirm that they used to regard an unemployment rate of less than 2 per cent as full employment. The unemployment rate is regarded differently now because people who leave work and change work are recorded differently. That is the point. The other point is slightly different.

**The Convener:** The point is that the phrase "modern sense of opportunity for all"

implies that that is different from the traditional sense of opportunity for all.

**Ms Curran:** But it is—that is my point. The traditional measurements are shifting. Get Gordon Brown here to explain it. Kenny Gibson would love that.

12:15

**Mr Gibson:** I am an economics graduate and I seem to remember that the measure of full employment depends on the structural strengths

and weaknesses of a specific economy at a specific time.

There are lies, damned lies and statistics. One of my concerns is that, for some of the Executive's milestones, there appears to be no real data to analyse. For example, the preamble to the "Every Community Matters" chapter of the report states:

"some groups face particular forms of advantage and discrimination - often called communities of interest. These include people from minority ethnic groups as well as people with disabilities and groups vulnerable to poverty."

However, the indicators in that chapter do not monitor the effect of policies on those groups. How can the committee and the public monitor the effect of Executive policies on such groups when performance information is not available?

**Ms Curran:** We made it clear in the report that we do not have all the data that we want, but we are making every effort to obtain them. I would not say that there is no performance information data, as some data are available—although they are imperfect and more work needs to be done on them. Some gender issues show up a bit better in the report. I think, too, that there are specific data on disability. Linda Rosborough can confirm whether that is the case.

**Linda Rosborough:** The data relate to the employment of disabled ethnic minority people, the over-50s and lone parents. Those data are disaggregated. We have a commitment to disaggregate. We hoped originally that we would be able to get a lot more data than we have been able to from the SIP monitoring and evaluation process. In practice, the data from that process were not of a high enough quality for us to use them in the report.

The statisticians jealously guard the quality of the report's data. They are bound by statistical codes that govern the quality of their data. Therefore, we can include only data of a quality with which the statisticians are happy. We cannot give disaggregated data that are not supported by quality data.

**Mr Gibson:** I tried to obtain the data from the Scottish Parliament information centre, but the Executive confirmed that figures on working children and pensioner poverty would not be divulged because it is unsure of their accuracy.

The Office of National Statistics—ONS—is undertaking a major neighbourhood statistics programme that covers England and Wales. Given the concerns about data accuracy, will the Executive commit funds to that project to ensure that coverage extends to Scotland? If not, how does the Executive intend to proceed on developing neighbourhood-level statistics and improving the quality of data?

**Ms Curran:** That matter has come up repeatedly, most recently in the parliamentary debate on the social justice report. If I remember rightly, Cathie Craigie made a point about statistics, which I tried to answer briefly at the end of the debate.

Getting the data right is a big issue and, as Linda Rosborough said, it is a SIP-level issue. We are spending £7 million on the neighbourhood statistics project to get the data that we need. We are co-operating with what is happening in England and Wales, but we are doing our project differently because we have different needs in Scotland. We are right to use our kind of model. Linda Rosborough can give members more information on the matter.

**Linda Rosborough:** We are investing £7 million in the project. The statisticians have put together a working group of people from different sectors to develop neighbourhood-level information that will cut across different sectors. We cannot use exactly the same methodology as the ONS because the rurality of small areas in Scotland is different from that in England. The working group is closely in touch with what the ONS is doing and is trying to achieve the same objectives with about the same level of resources, proportionately.

**Cathie Craigie:** I have a point about the disaggregation of information down to a local level. North Lanarkshire Council, which is in the area that I represent, takes seriously the work that is required to respond to the social justice agenda. As well as trying to meet the Executive's milestones and targets, the council has set itself similar ones. However, the council finds it difficult to know where it should target its policies, because it cannot get local-level information.

I am pleased that the Executive is doing more in that area, but if we want to make the process work, everybody—the schools, the LECs and whoever—must play their part. We need to be able to identify who is letting the side down. Without local information, the council's job is doubly difficult. I urge the minister to give a commitment to do all that she can on the matter.

**Ms Curran:** Absolutely. North Lanarkshire Council is doing interesting work. We need to spend money to get statistics that tell us where we need to prioritise. That will lead to greater accountability, some of which will be painful, because it will be obvious where the gaps are. We need to get the statistics to answer questions that it is proper for people to ask.

**The Convener:** Thank you. Before we finish, it is appropriate to thank Margaret Curran and her officials for attending the meeting.

People will be aware that this meeting was deferred because of the uncertainty about

ministerial portfolios. The committee wants to put on record its thanks to the former Minister for Social Justice, Jackie Baillie, with whom we had a close working relationship while working on the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. As I said before, bonding occurred then that will live with us for the rest of our lives. We thank Jackie Baillie for all the work that she did to support the committee's priorities.

We also welcome Iain Gray, who was not here today, to his new position. I am absolutely confident that he will work closely with the committee in the future.

**Ms Curran:** I will warn him.

*Meeting closed at 12:21.*



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