



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 27 September 2012

Session 4

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

17th Meeting 2012, Session 4

CONVENER

*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con)

*Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Thornton

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 27 September 2012

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Mary Fee): Good morning and welcome to the 17th meeting in 2012 of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I remind everyone to switch mobile devices to silent or switch them off.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Are members content to take in private item 4, on our approach to our work programme? My view is that there is no particular reason why we need to take the item in private. I raised the issue last week. The subject of the item is already in the public domain and there has been quite a lot of publicity surrounding it. It has been discussed in the chamber and we would not be breaching any confidentiality by discussing it in public. I am keen to hear members' views.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I do not necessarily accept that position. As there may be other matters to discuss, it would be more appropriate to take the item in private.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I agree with John Finnie. We have to make sensitive choices about our work programme, in which a lot of deserving causes may be discussed. In order to have a frank discussion and properly assess things, it would be beneficial to take the item in private.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I have not really thought about why work programmes are discussed in private—that is a general point, rather than with reference to today. I think that people are entitled to know what we are discussing, and why we rule some things out and do not take them forward. We do not get the opportunity to discuss that with people when we talk about our full work programme and how it is decided.

Today's issue is in the public domain and therefore we should have the discussion out in the open, so that people can understand why we make the decision that we make. We have had a lot of correspondence on the matter in recent days and I have read through it all. The people who have corresponded are entitled to know why we take the view that we do, whatever it may be.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I would be grateful for the clerk's guidance. I do not

know what normal practice is when a committee is discussing its work programme.

The Convener: I am advised that the matter is at the committee's discretion and that the decision is the committee's to make. However, work programmes are sometimes discussed in private because of confidentiality and sensitivity regarding names.

Annabel Goldie: I have some sympathy with both the views that have been expressed. My personal instinct is that discussion is perhaps less inhibited in private, and, on balance, that is my preference.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Convener, you said "sometimes". I contest that the majority of work programme discussions are held in private. I am not sure of the parliamentary protocol, but in my short time as an elected member every discussion about a work programme in which I have been involved has been held in private.

Regarding the subject of Remploy, it is in the public domain, but there are other things in our work programme to consider. We need to give due consideration to everything, and weigh and balance whether we take certain things forward. That means that we need an open and frank discussion. An open and frank discussion to weigh the committee's priorities should be held in private.

Marco Biagi: I am curious, as I was not a member of the committee until recently. Did the committee have a business planning day before the start of the parliamentary year, as is common in other committees? If so, was an *Official Report* produced or did that take place in private?

The Convener: We had a business planning day, which was informal.

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I do not think that I can add too much. I believe that it is easier to discuss things in private, as people might have issues to talk about. A lot of things that we would talk about are in the public domain, such as Gypsy Travellers and other issues. I am also new to the committee. A lot of equal opportunities issues that we would discuss are already in the public domain.

Dennis Robertson: We have an opportunity to speak to the United Kingdom Minister for Disabled People on 22 October. I would like to take the item in private, because the committee has an opportunity to speak to the UK minister and our own minister, Fergus Ewing, at that meeting.

The Convener: The broad consensus of the committee is that we agree to take the item in private.

Work Programme

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of the committee's work programme. We have been asked to sponsor a committee-sponsored exhibition in March 2013, which will focus on the lives of Gypsy Travellers and is being launched to coincide with Holocaust memorial day. The clerks have circulated a paper that explains the exhibition's purpose.

Jean Urquhart: Will the exhibition stand on the ground floor? What form will it take?

The Convener: It will be located in the members' lobby at the back of the members' block. Does the committee agree to sponsor the exhibition?

Members *indicated agreement.*

09:07

Meeting continued in private until 11:02.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-4061-9647-4

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-4061-9661-0