The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 20 February 2014

Session 4

Thursday 20 February 2014

CONTENTS

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
3rd Meeting 2014, Session 4

CONVENER

*Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)
*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
*Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Dr Duncan Morrow (Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland)
Dr Michael Rosie (Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Thornton

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 20 February 2014

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Margaret McCulloch): Welcome to the Equal Opportunities Committee's third meeting of 2014. Please set any electronic devices to flight mode or off.

We will come to the usual introductions in a moment. Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Members are asked to agree to take items 3 and 4 in private. Are we agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Tackling Sectarianism

10:00

The Convener: Item 2 is an evidence session on the work of the advisory group on tackling sectarianism in Scotland.

We will start with some introductions. We have members of our clerking and research teams, official reporters and broadcasting services staff at the table, and around the room we are supported by the security office. I also welcome observers in the public gallery.

I am the committee's convener. I invite members and witnesses to introduce themselves in turn. I also invite witnesses, as they introduce themselves, to make an opening statement at the same time.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I am the MSP for Edinburgh Central and deputy convener of the committee.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Madainn mhath; good morning. I am an MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am an MSP for Central Scotland.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am the MSP for Glasgow Shettleston.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I am a member for North East Scotland.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Good morning. I am an MSP for North East Scotland.

Dr Michael Rosie (Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland): Good morning. I am from the University of Edinburgh.

Dr Duncan Morrow (Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland): I am from the University of Ulster, and I have been chair of the advisory group.

The Convener: Would either of you like to make an opening statement?

Dr Morrow: I am happy to do so if that will help, but if you would rather start with questions, that is also all right.

The Convener: It would be helpful to have an opening statement.

Dr Morrow: I will give a brief statement to give some sense of the issue. First, I would like to thank you for inviting us to this session. It is always important to see that what one does is being taken seriously, so thank you for asking us here to discuss our work.

We have been working since September last year on the issue, and our group was established by the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs to look into the matter. Specifically, we were looking for a way of addressing the issue that took it away from the megaphone or the silence and dealt with it as a community-based issue. We wanted to find some more effective ways of dealing with what is probably a long-term question, rather than an acute one, in Scotland, and something that needs a specific, local and proper response that is real for people in real circumstances.

There is a lot of talk around sectarianism, but our remit was to try to work out what we are talking about. It is a theme on which everyone seems to have a view, but the evidence base is not very strong, so we needed to establish that evidence base and agree on the three basic questions of what it was, where it was and how it could best be dealt with.

To answer those questions, we took a broadly three-pronged approach. In the first instance, we were asked to look at the research base, and we have tried to ensure that in future there is more evidence, both at a quantitative and at a qualitative level. We have been working with the Scottish Government to see what research agenda might be useful as we try to get a real shape around the issue, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Secondly, we considered what advice to give on practice. In many ways, we feel that sectarianism is experienced as a human issue, so we asked whether, through the available Scottish Government budget, we could try to improve the knowledge base and practice base of people in real circumstances, and we have given advice on the distribution of those resources. The minister has already taken that advice, but we must ensure that resources are spread more widely than just one or two organisations.

Alongside that, we tried to create what might be called a learning framework, to gather together all that information, so we have tried to encourage conversations between all those groups about what they are learning and developing, so that there can be a long-term, lasting legacy. That includes resources online and things that will enable people to build around a hub of knowledge about such work.

The third aspect of our approach was to take evidence from people who have been actively engaged in the topic. That was the most time-consuming part of our work, because we tried to talk to all stakeholders across Scotland in the time that we had. We had very important discussions with people from all walks of life that convinced us that there was an issue but that it had changed over time and there was generally an appetite for it to not be an issue. Broadly, people were concerned about how the issue could be taken off the table instead of being reinforced.

We characterised two fears, one of which is that by naming the issue we make real and worse something that is slowly going away; and the other of which is that we are not taking the issue seriously enough and that it is a much more serious and significant issue that has been pushed under the carpet and hidden. Our view was that the issue had to be neither of those and that we needed to take it out of the fear box and turn it into something that is dealt with as a matter of fact. We tried to put some policy around it and to get people to step up to the plate. We turned it into something that can be dealt with. It is our view that most people in Scotland would like to do that now, if they could. They would like to take the steps that make the issue something that is no longer a kind of ghost at the feast.

I will say one or two more things, and then we can take questions, because I think that committee members will have the report in front of them. The soundbite that we have ended up using in answer to the question “Where does sectarianism matter?” is that, first, it matters when it is about glass bottles. In other words, it matters when it is about violence, intimidation and threats and people feel that there is a genuine issue with that. Secondly, it matters if and when it is about glass ceilings—if it operates in such a way that people feel that there are things that they cannot do and feel that there are cold houses for certain people in certain parts of society. Thirdly, it matters where there are what we have called glass curtains, where there are communities that exist in isolation from each other and talk inside themselves, which means that we are not getting the benefit of the social cohesion that would be there if there was greater interaction. That creates ignorance, prejudice and so on, which seem to be acted out particularly in schools and among young people. The question is what we can do about that.

Those were the core issues. We found an appetite for change and we came to the view that the issues around sectarianism are leadership, trying to get some colour into the issue and getting the research base right. We did not come to the view that that would be driven primarily by legislation at this point. I think that that is probably everything.

Dr Rosie: I will just add that we met with generosity from all the stakeholders. What has been refreshing is that although people often had very different views, they talked to us very openly about the issue. We had lots of co-operation from key stakeholders, particularly in the Parliament, where we had very good and positive cross-party

support. As an independent group, we need that and we hope that it can continue. It has been very encouraging.

The evidence base is crucial. We must move the issue from being a thing that everyone knows about but does not quite know how to pin down, to one on which we say, "When, where and how is this thing important?" and, "When, where and how does this thing impact on people's lives and how can we make that better?" A key part of that is the work that we have done around the formal work of the group, which has often been working with some of the funded organisations to think about ways in which their work can be evaluated and feed into the research base. Money is being invested in community work that I think can also help us more broadly understand what is going on. That has been quite an exciting thing. It is not formally in the report, but there have been lots of activities around that.

I thank you for inviting us.

The Convener: Thank you for coming. What you have been saying is really interesting. We will go to questions now, and John Finnie will ask the first.

John Finnie: Good morning, gentlemen. Thanks very much for the report and for coming along. I enjoyed reading the report. You have largely answered my question, which is about the evidence base and the group's view that it was insufficient. I found it interesting that you used the term "evidence agenda" in talking about qualitative and quantitative evidence. Can you expand on that? For instance, how could that feed into any future action plans?

Dr Morrow: I will say a few words and then Michael Rosie will come in.

In some senses, there is a quantitative issue about what people can access or do and whether this is a real issue. A lot of this is in the fabric of community life; it is in what happens in communities and how people live and experience their day-to-day lives. At one level, we wanted to track that issue and put it back into the questions to ensure that it was asked about. Such questions are being asked in the attitude surveys, the omnibus surveys and across the board and we will be able to track whether reality is changing for people.

The avoidance culture around the issue has been largely driven by a sort of "It's best left on its own" attitude. Actually, if we have any message, it is that we should not be so frightened of this and that we should be able to name, address and tackle it. Indeed, the only way forward here is to ask, "What is the actual size and shape of this?"

The two formal evidence tracks that we have taken—I suppose that Michael Rosie's work has added a third to those—are, first, to insert a set of questions to aid, where possible, the quantitative measuring of attitudes and experiences across the board. We have done that in a number of cases.

Secondly, we have identified a number of research projects, and one that is about to report is on the impact of parades on local communities, the consequences for those who participate and those who live in the areas where they take place and the short and long-term impacts on relationships. The University of Stirling has the contract to carry out that work. We are also carrying out research into a number of gender issues and are quite interested in looking at how the internet functions in all of this, because there is very clear evidence that that has become an open space where the allegations and other things that people throw each other have some impact. We are trying to ensure that we understand what we are talking about before we take action, and I hope that all of that work will feed into something that people feel will be useful.

Thirdly, practitioners have provided us with a lot of evidence about what they are finding with young people, and some of the work in that respect is about turning what might appear to be anecdote into something serious. Kids in the playground might tell you that this issue actually matters and, indeed, it appears to work at a very deep root of identity formation as a result, for example, of children getting shouted at at bus stops when they are eight years old, but the question is how we turn all that into evidence of how people live together. We are trying to make pathways in that respect because, after all, the key issue is to know what you are talking about before you do anything.

Dr Rosie: When you ask an academic about research, they are always going to answer, "We need lots more of it," and say that more money should be thrown at academia for that work.

We have come into this with what in some respects is a very good research base. The 2001 census, for example, gave us quite a good research base on life chances by religious group and, for the first time, we were able to look at educational attainment, occupations, housing and so on across Scotland. However, an area in which we are particularly weak—and this is important for sectarianism—is people's attitudes and perceptions. This is not necessarily about life chances or outcomes but about how people live their everyday lives. I say this as someone with a quantitative background, but quantitative methods are not well suited to that work and we have recognised that we need to get at the more everyday things in life which, although in some ways mundane, can actually matter very much.

The existing evidence suggests that there might be a difference between people's perception of sectarianism as a problem and their experience of it themselves. We have to get at that, because we might need to reassure the public that Scotland is not necessarily the way they might be worrying about it. I always compare the issue with people's fear of crime. Although my own parents live in an area with a very low level of crime, they are still very worried about it. I think that, in some ways, sectarianism might actually be a worry for some groups in certain places, and we need evidence to try to reassure people that sectarianism is not everywhere at all times but is in some places at some times. As I have said, quantitative approaches are not necessarily good for that kind of work.

As Duncan Morrow has said, we have commissioned the University of Stirling to carry out research on the impact on local communities of parades—by which I mean not just Orange or republican parades but parades that might not have any direct relevance to sectarian issues. That report will come out in the summer, and we are also looking at tenders for a qualitative study on the impact of sectarianism in communities that I hope will tease out where, when, how and to whom this sort of thing actually occurs.

Sorry to go on, but if you ask an academic about research, you will not get a short answer. It is important to be evidence based as much as possible. One key point is that we are trying to move towards a wider, deeper and richer range of evidence that policy makers can look at it.

10:15

John Finnie: As my questions evidence, I am not an academic. On the census, which you mentioned, the frequency of it might impact on your ability to do research. Another issue on that is the increasing number of people who no longer identify themselves with a specific religion or faith. Perhaps I should know this, but to what extent do perceptions and views, such as fear of crime, which you mentioned, constitute evidence? Clearly, they must, to an extent.

Dr Rosie: Absolutely, perceptions can be crucial, because they can impact on how people live their lives. If someone is worried that going down a certain street or into a particular pub or club would impact on them, even if it would not, they will not go there. Perceptions are a crucial part of the evidence.

On the point about people being non-religious, I guess that part of my role in the group is to keep putting up my hand and asking about people who do not fall easily into some of the formulations. The census suggests that more and more people in Scotland do not assign themselves a label in that way, and they are an important group. The Equal Opportunities Committee will understand this far better than I do, but, although in equalities work I routinely hear the formulation "all faiths and none", in practice the "and none" often gets pushed to the side a little. It will become more important that we appreciate that there is a wide range of beliefs and positions on religion in Scotland. In future, we will have to recognise the rights of all those groups to be involved.

This is not part of our group's remit, but tensions are certainly continuing and emerging between those who do not have strong beliefs—what we might call the secular part of our society—and those who do. As a society, we need to pay attention to the fact that people should be able to express their views on religion, whether they are religious or irreligious views, without necessarily being worried about causing conflict.

Dr Morrow: Additionally, part of the problem of tackling sectarianism is that it cannot be separated from religious roots and religious institutions, but things have grown out of that whose religious roots have become weaker over time while the same relationships and consequences continue to structure things. When we considered the definitions and what we were trying to grasp, we found that there are some things in which religion and churches played a role historically and continue to do so. We have been clear that those relationships are important and we cannot distinguish that aspect. However, on the other side, there are institutions that were built along those lines but where the requirement to believe has withered while the sense of identity has been maintained, and there is considerable evidence that people still draw on slogans and assumptions and a set of rituals around that.

To tackle sectarianism in a meaningful way, we have to find something that deals with all of that. As Police Scotland told us, there is sometimes a permissive environment around hostility and aggression, which works its way out to people. Actually, we are trying to eliminate any permissive environment around hostility or anything that looks like discrimination or antagonism. At some deep level, that has to go if there is to be some sense in real life that sectarianism is a thing of the past and that we can talk about it as history rather than real life.

Just to be clear, our goal is absolutely not to eliminate difference; it is to eliminate hostility. That is a thin line. Some people quickly think that we are trying to get rid of difference, but that is not at all what it is about. In fact, what we are trying to do here is to rescue difference from hostility, so that the pluralism of Scotland is allowed but in the context of people understanding that this

contribution can be made without it being a negative one.

John Finnie: Thank you.

Siobhan McMahon: I am particularly interested in the section of the report on what sectarianism is not, which I think we will return to later. However, I have a specific question about the census. You discuss what anti-Irish prejudice is. Is it important to have those invisible minorities, as I would call them—the Irish community, the Polish community, the Italians—identified in future censuses? We have had progress in the UK census, but should they be included in our local censuses? As we have just identified, it may be that many people do not identify themselves with a religion, but they may be in one of those minority groups. How important is that?

Dr Rosie: Most people in Scotland identified themselves with a religion in the census—off the top of my head, the figure was about 65 per cent, or two thirds.

You are asking an academic who is interested in issues of national, religious and ethnic belonging what should be in the census. I would like as many questions as possible. [*Laughter*.]

We would all recognise that Scotland has been made up of recurrent in-migrations throughout its history, and therefore that there are many ways to belong in Scotland. One can be Irish and British and Scottish and European, et cetera, at the same time.

I am very interested in this area of work. I hope that the census will continue in a comprehensive form in Scotland and that it will ask questions about ethnic belonging that include whether people regard themselves as Polish, Irish, Indian, Pakistani or whatever, but which also allow multiple belongings. People should not be asked to tick one box. They should be able to tick as many boxes as are relevant.

Dr Morrow: As with all these issues, the balance to be struck is between a monitoring that allows us to be serious about real issues and a labelling that forces people into a straitjacket that they do not want to be in. It is important, in constructing the census, that we think about that. If we think that there are potential issues that need to be dug up—as members of the Equal Opportunities Committee, you will be aware of the things that arrive on your desks—those questions need to be asked.

The section of the report on what sectarianism is not is really trying to say that there are grey areas where things shade into other things. We say that it is not anti-Catholicism, but that is not the same thing as saying that anti-Catholicism and sectarianism do not have a really big overlap. They do. It is not anti-Irishness, but that is not to say that there is not an anti-Irish dimension to sectarianism. It is a complicated thing. It is not just overt bigotry, as it can be a silent or quiet discriminatory thing. Last week, there was stuff in *The Herald* about people going into golf clubs, where there are implicit rules that people just assume. Those have gone on for ages and nobody has ever challenged them. That is just one of those things, in reality.

It is important to try not to limit things. Your question was about the importance of finding the right questions that elicit the real issues, and we need to ask those questions.

The Convener: How did you compile the definition? How was it reached? What did the advisory group decide not to include in it, and why?

Dr Morrow: Those are good questions. First, the fact that the definition is a paragraph and not a sentence illustrates how complicated it is to get our heads round all the dimensions. Secondly, it is a working definition. In Stirling last month, we consulted all the stakeholders on what they wanted it to include. We see it as trying to pull out something that we can then work on together because it is a common definition.

You asked us how we came to the definition and what we put into it. In some ways you need to read the definition along with the paragraphs on what sectarianism is not. We are trying to describe a phenomenon in relationships. Sectarianism is a reality in relationships. Like all equalities issues, sectarianism is not an "it"—there is not something that you can pick out.

In this case, because the issue is so rooted, it nearly always exists with other things—for example, class issues. It is experienced differently by people in different classes and in different economic conditions in the community. It has different impacts on people in different regions, because the history of people's interaction on the issue has been remarkably different. It has become clear that the experience is also different for the different sides of the Catholic-Protestant divide, if you want to use that term. We were trying to say that we know that it is about attitudes and behaviour and that it involves legacy issues, which come out of history as repeated behaviour or received normality and all those kind of things. We put those into the definition.

We wanted to be clear that, although sectarianism has religious origins from which it cannot be separated, the definition has to be expanded to include institutions that were built on that assumption of difference and division and has to go beyond faith statements and include cultural identity.

We also wanted to draw lines between the things that we talked about previously: anti-Catholicism is part of it, but it is not the whole story and such things need to be treated differently. Likewise, when it comes to anti-Irishness and aggressive bigotry, some people have a tendency to think that sectarianism is limited to the idea of 90-minute bigotry and that it is simply something that exists for working-class people in the west of Scotland. That is at one end, and it is certainly true that, at times, sectarianism takes on a very aggressive face at football matches in the west of Scotland. Nobody doubts that. However, for us, to limit it to that and to say that that is all that it is and that it comes from nowhere else and stops at that point does not reflect reality.

Out of that work came a very specific and tentative definition. Over the next year and a half we want to work on refining the definition and to report back to you that, having talked to people, we think that we will be able to refine it.

Alex Johnstone: When you were framing the definition at the outset, did you consider the broader spectrum? Did you look at other forms of religious intolerance?

Dr Rosie: The short answer is that we were expressly tasked with looking at intra-Christian sectarianism—the shorthand would be Catholic versus Protestant sectarianism in Scotland. Many people whom we talked to spoke about other kinds of intolerance. As Duncan Morrow suggests, this phenomenon bleeds into other phenomena. For example, it bleeds into forms of racism, into secular-faith conflicts and into other forms of religious intolerance such as Islamophobia. All those things were raised.

In framing the definition, we tried to listen to what people were telling us and to cast a wide net so that we did not exclude too many things without making it so broad that it became meaningless. That was exceptionally difficult because sectarianism does not exist in isolation. It always exists with something else, whether it is class, gender or locality. It might also be about the time of day and whether it is the weekend, for example. It might be linked to what has been happening, and it can relate to politics as well as to national and ethnic identities. Although we were tasked with getting a definition, it was very difficult to get one that included everything that we wanted to include, but did not include absolutely everything. I would see the work on sectarianism as only part of many broader things that relate to equalities.

10:30

Dr Morrow: It might be worth saying that part of the problem with sectarianism is that it is either too big or too small. In other words, it is either too massive to be dealt with so we put it to one side and do not talk about it—that is, it is not properly within the equalities framework as one of the equalities issues that needs to be dealt with like every other one—or it is seen as being too small and does not really matter, which is why people only talk about the other equalities issues.

Success will be being able to deal with sectarianism as one issue among others. All equalities have important interlocking, cross-cutting issues. The experience of minorities at all levels has commonalities, such as the experience of being under attack.

Alex Johnstone: That is what I was going to ask about. Did your experience of the broader, more contemporary environment bring anything to your understanding of the historic and cultural environment?

Dr Morrow: I suppose so, yes. I will speak for myself and my experience. I had to be extremely careful not to read across from my own situation in Northern Ireland to here. There is a risk of using the same language and one thing becoming another when the situations are not the same. They are distinctive phenomena, even if they are connected.

The extent to which the management of sectarianism was mostly informal rather than formal shows that people in certain communities are very alert to it. It structures reality but it does not come to the surface. In many ways, its management has been devolved down to people to sort out for themselves and it is only dealt with when it turns into something that has to be dealt with by the criminal justice system, such as juvenile issues, issues in prisons, and issues with the police. The police then bring back those issues and say that we have to think about them when they involve parades, football matches, youth culture, gang violence and so on. In all those issues, there are traces of where sectarianism is very real.

Keeping it informal has the impact of making people think that it is a kind of extremism that lives in its own pocket and does not connect to anything else. I hope that our work is about changing the culture. It is not about naming and shaming any more. It is about saying that, in certain places, we have inherited a phenomenon that affects how we do things and which has had and, in some cases, still has impacts on people. We now need to set aside those impacts and people need to step up to the plate.

The driver behind the recommendations in the report was the attempt to turn the issue, as far as possible, into a matter of fact question on which we can look for evidence of progress. Local authorities can have their own ideas about what

they want to do and set up appropriate programmes for young people and other communities. If statistics show that there is discrimination in access to goods and services, that has to be dealt with as a matter of fact. The churches, football clubs, schools and all the various institutions that have some connection to the issue could have programmes and pathways for interacting with it at their own level.

There is no single magic bullet. There is no way for us to be able to say next week, "This is over." We can only say that, if people take responsibility for their bits rather than pretend that it is going away, that is probably where there is most hope for progress.

Alex Johnstone: That leads on to my final question. The paragraph that you have come up with is obviously a deeply considered definition of the problem as it exists in Scotland. Will that definition endure or do you wish to review it as time goes on?

Dr Rosie: Thank you for those kind words.

It is absolutely a working definition. If it is still the definition in 10 years, I will think that our committee has failed. It is a considered and measured starting point but, as Duncan Morrow said, we have asked funded groups in various communities in Scotland how useful the definition is when they think about framing responses to sectarianism in their areas. We will certainly collate and think about what they tell us.

I hope that the working definition will evolve and improve; it may become tighter in some places and slightly looser in others. It is absolutely a working definition, which we expect—and hope—will become more focused and tighter.

Dr Morrow: That is correct. There is a part of that definition that we can get a bit of a handle on. It talks about

"destructive patterns of relating which segregate, exclude, discriminate against or are violent towards a specified religious other".

We should look at any evidence that we have of those things and ask whether they are still real for people and what we can do about them. Those are legitimate areas of concern for public policy and for people in positions of responsibility in community and public life, which we can do something about.

Siobhan McMahon: I want to return to what sectarianism is not. For those of us who take an interest in the subject, paragraph 3.8.3 is welcome. It says:

"Sectarianism in Scotland has at times been closely associated with anti-Irish prejudice. However, the two are not identical. The religious dimension is distinctive in sectarianism. Anti-Irishness, in a cultural sense, is clearly a form of racism and should be named as such."

Up until this point, I do not believe that that has happened, whether in legislation that the Parliament has passed or elsewhere, although I understand that it was not part of your remit to look at the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012 or any other piece of legislation.

At times, what paragraph 3.8.3 says is not recognised, whether in the media or in education. Many groups are pinning their hopes on that paragraph helping people to understand the subject of sectarianism. As parliamentarians, how can we take forward what it says? The report contains many, many good things—for those of us who have been crying out for something like it, it is a fantastic report. How can we take forward that paragraph, which means a lot to certain communities?

Dr Rosie: Thank you for your positivity—it is much appreciated.

We need to recognise that racism has many forms and that racism is racism. I think that that is what that paragraph is saying. One of the things that we heard was that sectarianism is only anti-Irish racism, which I think does a great injustice to the other forms of sectarianism that exist.

As I understand the laws on race discrimination, anti-Irish racism is recognised in law and is actionable under law, and it is absolutely the case that it should be. If we can move the debate about sectarianism on in a way that allows other, interlinked forms of discrimination and prejudice to be better recognised and addressed, that will be a good thing.

I am not sure that that answers your question.

Siobhan McMahon: I agree with everything that you say, but what I am trying to get at is that if, as parliamentarians, we do not make the distinction that paragraph 3.8.3 makes and we continue to talk about sectarianism in the terms that it has been talked about in the past, we will not address the racism part of the issue. As a result, we will do a disservice to everyone who experiences sectarianism, because we give too much weight to one side of the issue. That is my view. How do we curtail that?

Dr Morrow: As we have already said, the issue cannot be addressed as a party-political issue. If it is addressed in that way, as I know from my experience, it becomes extremely difficult to have a serious conversation about it.

My view on the role of Parliament is that it is extremely important that the Government and the Parliament have given us permission to do our

work. Leadership and a permissive environment are extremely important.

Secondly, in pursuing the issue, it might be that some of the lines of difference and the overlaps in the way in which the Parliament thinks and talks about it and legislates on it could now be usefully teased out. The fact that permission has been given for that conversation to take place and for people to say, "This is about this and that is about that," will enable us to get a more sophisticated understanding of the issue over time in the legislation that is passed. I think that that is what we are trying to say here.

Thirdly, the turning of the tanker here involves quality and the willingness to have conversations about and intervene on policy around this stuff. Part of that is pretty much about the collective interest that we found, because nobody said, "If there's anything we can do, we shouldn't do it." If Parliament can foster that kind of atmosphere across society, we might be able to come back here in 10 years' time and say that this is something that has definitively moved on. If we are looking for progress measures, that would be one for me. We did not put it into the report, but that is what we want to be able to say. If a parliamentary committee sits here in 10 years' time and looks at what the reality is on the issue, we want to be able to say that it has moved on in terms of tone, quality, recognition and clearer definitions about what we are having to deal with, and that it is part of our history but not something that impedes relationships in Scotland any more.

John Mason: I, too, found reading your report a positive experience. I particularly agree that if we have a problem, we need to talk about it. That applies to loads of society's problems. I suppose one of the roles of this committee is to raise issues and get them into the public domain a little bit.

You said that your work has a year and a half to go. I understand that you have submitted the report to the Government, so I assume that we are waiting for the Government's response to it. There is quite a lot in the report that says, for example, that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities should do this, or that march and parade organisers, local authorities, Police Scotland and so on should do that. How do you see that going forward in practical terms?

Dr Morrow: Obviously, we are an independent group that was established to look at how this work could be done. Although we do not think that this is something that should be dealt with by legislation alone, that is not to say that we think that equalities legislation is not very important. It has an extremely important role in human rights legislation in ensuring the tones within which it happens. We are not presenting an anti-legislative framework; we are simply saying that all the legislation is in place.

What is really important is that some shoulders go to the wheel and that we eventually tease out where we find it: we identified a number of levels at which action and responsibility could and might be taken and we have tried to outline them in the report. Part of our work for the next year and a half is continuing to tease that out with the various stakeholders.

The Government will make its own response—we understand by the end of the month—so at some stage in the next few weeks we will have a formal response from the Government on those things that relate to it.

John Mason: Can we as the Equal Opportunities Committee—a committee that represents the Parliament—just sit back and let you get on with it?

Dr Morrow: No. I definitely think that, given that this committee has relationships with all the bodies to which we have referred, it would be interesting for the committee to continue to press people on their role on the issue. For example, we think that the relationship with local government is really important, not so much in terms of future resources or anything of that nature, but in terms of getting locally relevant examples that make sense at the grass roots in real communities. In that regard, one of the most impressive projects that we saw was one called sense over sectarianism, which works in Glasgow City Council. A small thing that it has done at one level is to use the novel "Divided City" as a mechanism to engage primary 6 and 7 pupils in schools. Although it is superficial at one level, at another level it has had a huge impact on the ability and willingness of schools to address the issue at P6 and P7 levels, and a number of people have rushed in to do that. We think that that is only a small start, but the fact that there was local authority leadership meant that the education department was able to take that one on a little bit.

We recognise that sectarianism is not the same thing in all parts of Scotland—it is experienced differently. The Glasgow project is an example of how we would like to see local authorities give leadership on the issue, because that makes sense.

The police have raised issues with us and asked us to look at them. In practical terms, we would very much like to hear from all the various stakeholders and we will be working with them.

10:45

It is not just about wagging your finger at people, though. We want to take this on. For

example, we want to see whether Education Scotland can develop curricular materials that could be helpful for people to use in schools. Can we take on the question of football and ensure that the authorities take the issue—which can become very big and dangerous—seriously?

John Mason: Specifically on local authorities, I noted that you felt that there was perhaps room for improvement on their part. Your group will therefore be interacting with local authorities and the Government may or may not say that it will interact with local authorities. I do not want our committee just to duplicate what you are doing or what somebody else is doing. Would it be useful for us to get some local authorities to come along to the committee so that we can ask them what they are doing or will you be doing that anyway?

Dr Morrow: We are only an independent advisory group. We do not have that public authority. If would be very useful if this could become an issue that is properly and appropriately discussed between the Parliament and the local authorities, because it is about putting flesh on the bones. We can make statements, but longer term activity is needed.

We exist for only the next 15 months, so I would like to see this being developed as a work programme—that is probably slightly overstated—that is collectively shared, with the Parliament taking an interest in the development of anti-sectarian work. The Parliament could look at the statistics and the research information that come back and the evidence that is coming up from practice, talk to the relevant stakeholders regularly and raise the issue appropriately. Such a work programme would enable the Parliament to continue to do that.

Certainly, when our committee goes away in 15 months' time—actually it is less than 15 months now, we go away in only a year's time—this work will not be finished. We have tried to tee it up, continue to raise the issue in the public domain and engage actively with all the stakeholders, but the work will require a leadership role and I would love the Parliament to participate in such a role.

Dr Rosie: Sectarianism, it seems to me, has not really been focused on as an equal opportunities issue; it has not been an equalities issue. It has often been a criminal justice matter or an antisocial behaviour matter. It is not for us to tell this committee what to do, but if it felt that sectarianism should be looked at in terms of equalities, I would very much welcome that support.

Our report calls for leadership across all parts of Scotland. In a sense, everyone in Scotland has a responsibility around this issue, even though it may not happen in our own lives. Duncan Morrow talked about his background; my interest in sectarianism is entire puzzlement. As someone who was born in Caithness and grew up in Edinburgh, it did not really feature in my life other than going to some football matches and wondering what it was all about.

I will go back to Alex Johnstone's earlier question—what have we added? One of the great enrichments of this work is an understanding that sectarianism might not impact on my life but it impacts on other people's lives and it is an equalities issue.

Dr Morrow: Even when you do not know about it.

Dr Rosie: Even when you do not know about it. It is about talking and listening to people and—this might go back to something that Siobhan McMahon was hinting at—it is about hearing the hurt of some people in Scotland in relation to the history of sectarianism. When academics say, "It is not in the structures, it is not in life chances," that perhaps ignores the lived experience and the real, visceral hurt and worry that people have. I think that it is an equalities issue, but it is up to this committee to decide whether it agrees with me.

Siobhan McMahon: Dr Rosie, you said that sectarianism should not be seen as a criminal justice matter, as did Dr Morrow previously. We now have an equalities minister in Shona Robison—a post that has been welcomed by the Parliament. However, religion is still in the justice department under its minister, Roseanna Cunningham. Do you have a view on that? What signal is sent to people who work in the field of anti-sectarianism when we say that the equality matter of sectarianism is in the justice portfolio?

Dr Morrow: It is not for us to make recommendations on how these things are dealt with. The overlaps are clear.

The answer to such questions is not either/or. We heard from Police Scotland in our work on prisons and so on that the issue impacts on the criminal justice system to some degree. However, the danger of treating it purely as a criminal justice issue is that it is viewed as something that can be tackled simply through the law and criminalisation, rather than through a wider, broader, longer social intervention.

My view—and the working group's view—is that, unless we can move the issue away from being seen simply as a criminal justice matter, it will continue to fester and to be pushed to one side. The answer is probably that it should have a leg in each department. If the issue was taken over by the equalities department and not dealt with by the justice department, there would be big problems too, so it is not a case of either/or.

It is interesting that the Equal Opportunities Committee is seen as the appropriate committee to deal with the issue. It is inevitable that the issue is dealt with by, and that there is discussion between, the different elements.

Christian Allard: Dr Rosie said that you were not here to tell us what to do, but I disagree. I hope that you can give us some ideas for what we can do next, particularly with regard to what you have just said. What should our remit be? I read your report, which is fantastic. You say that you do not want more legislation, or any change in the legislation with regard to racism, and you note that there is already legislation that addresses the anti-Irish element of the sectarian debate. I have a feeling that you are here at the Equal Opportunities Committee because you want to affect the committee's work, rather than address the legal or racism aspects.

Dr Morrow: We certainly think that the issue has to be proactively monitored. Part of what we are trying to do is to ensure that the research base is in place and that the work is done—that is a proactive element. There are elements such as curricular development and the development of community policy; areas of discussion around cultural policy; and areas such as the relationship with local government. All those elements need to be proactively monitored and we need to develop where responsibility for the work should lie.

This is just an anecdote. We made only two interventions in the press during the year. One was an interview that I did in *The Herald* around Christmas time, which set off a fire-storm about whether sectarianism was still the biggest civil rights issue in Scotland. The press discussion was about whether we were taking the issue seriously and that it was much bigger than anybody wanted to accept.

The second intervention was an article that I wrote in *Scotland on Sunday*. Afterwards, all the correspondence was about why we were kicking around the issue, that it was a dead issue and did not matter at all, and that we were raising something that was already on the way out.

The management of the issue to date has been at either of those poles: through a megaphone or in silence. There is hysteria, or there is nothing.

The appropriate committees in the Scottish Parliament could integrate the issue into their work so that it becomes part of their monitoring frameworks; ask legitimate questions on whether strategies are in place; ask local government to come forward with ideas on how it is addressing the issue in local areas; and ask the relevant parts of the police system how they are addressing the issue as we move forward. That is what the answer looks like for us. We need a cultural change, which would be led from the Parliament and from the atmosphere in the Parliament.

Christian Allard: I have seen the long list of groups for which funding of £4.8 million has been earmarked. That is a vast amount of money, and I hope that it will make a big difference. However, I did not see Show Racism the Red Card in the list.

Dr Morrow: That group has now been funded.

Dr Rosie: It is the show bigotry the red card campaign.

Christian Allard: I just wanted to check.

Which key areas should we focus on? You have spoken about local authorities and education, and a little about the media. Should we focus on the media, or only on work in the communities?

Dr Morrow: To be honest, I think that working with communities is only one aspect. We need to focus on education, local government, culture and sport and the media, and obviously justice will run alongside all of those things. Those are the public policy areas where this issue has the most profound impact. The normalisation of this as an equalities issue is the cultural issue that we are addressing this morning, but if you are asking me very specifically what the areas of action should be I would have to say education, local government and sport.

As far as the media are concerned, the important question is not just whether but how the issue is discussed. The tendency is for it not to be mentioned in the press at all until it flares up as some justice incident, and we need to create a subculture in which the issue is not just turned into a story that is splashed on the front page but is presented as a long story of change in Scotland. We have had discussions on that very matter.

On top of that, and connected with the term "media", is the very difficult and vexed issue of social media. We have had quite a lot of evidence that, in that space, the degree of aggression and violence that surrounds what comes out of sectarianism and which perhaps starts with football but ends up in youth culture and all sorts of other places is serious and is having an impact on people. We have not yet discussed exactly what we can do about that but we have heard about the police's concerns that, although social media provides an open space in which something is happening that they know is having an impact, finding some intervention that does not do any damage will be a complicated matter. There are issues to consider in that respect.

Dr Rosie: There is always a risk in presenting some Christmas list of the areas that we would want to focus on. Duncan Morrow talked about hostility to difference; to me, difference is good and, indeed, is what makes life in our society

vibrant and interesting but sometimes people react to it with hostility. That hostility, which results in people misbehaving, breaking the law or discriminating against others, is dealt with at the criminal justice end, so we have the framework for that sort of thing.

This might be a personal statement, but I would really like to see more of a celebration of difference. We come from all parts of the world and have all kinds of different views; sometimes we will disagree but that is fine. It might suit the Equal Opportunities Committee more if it pursued that kind of line.

Dr Morrow: A certain element of equality and human rights work that is very underdeveloped but which we instinctively know is very important goes by the name of good relations. It has been poorly developed because it is quite hard to get a legal handle on it. Nevertheless, we need to develop a strategy that deals with what good relations mean on the ground and in real life. Good relations, of course, do not mean that people do not have disagreements; instead, they ensure that their disagreements are handled properly. The issue is also about the development of common citizenship and so on.

I realise that that is all very vague, but in some of the legislation there is a recognition that simple hard-edged laws in themselves do not focus on the kinds of outcomes that we want and, in fact, must be connected with each other. Another area of work is the monitoring of—or at least engagement with—the idea that this is ceasing to be something that we are frightened or scared of or which is having a negative effect on real people's lives. Instead, we need to think about the issue of difference, realise that we have it and understand that it is what, in fact, makes life in Scotland interesting.

The Convener: Going back to education, I note that on page 10 of your report you say:

"We do not believe that sectarianism stems from, or is the responsibility of, denominational schooling, or, specifically, Catholic schools, nor that sectarianism would be eradicated by closing such institutions".

In paragraph 6.44.4, on page 38, you talk about shared campuses and about forging links and strong partnerships with communities. Will you elaborate on your findings?

11:00

Dr Morrow: The issue that you raise is another on which people go to one end or the other, and it is one that people do not like to raise because we end up in a conversation that is particularly unconstructive—it eventually turns into a yes or no on Catholic schools.

First, we took the view that the responsibility does not lie with any institution and certainly not with Catholic schools—it does not lie with a particular group, and anything that starts from that perspective is unhelpful and wrong. Secondly, the issue is not just to do with schools—it is across the board. If one institution was to be shut, all sorts of other institutions that have nothing to do with schools would have to be shut. Thirdly, some good schools have made good contributions to good citizenship and how people relate to other people. Those schools have been successful in doing that and their contributions have been important.

Rather than focus on whether schools should be shut, our view was that we should encourage people in schools—of whatever kind—to take sectarianism as a reality and develop creative mechanisms that engage with it. The key question is not what kind of school an institution is but what a school is doing in relation to the sectarianism that is being experienced.

We found examples of good practice in a number of places, which we thought that we should encourage. Teachers are leading extremely innovative and systematic programmes for their kids, which we would like to be developed. We would like greater support in the curriculum to enable people to talk about and engage with the issue.

Shared-campus schools provide an opportunity for everybody to move past the sense of splendid isolation and begin to see experiences as more normal. However, even when campuses are not shared, possibilities are built into how schools operate to address and talk about the impacts inside schools and to develop interesting curricular initiatives that are supported from outside the community.

Our view is that sectarianism is attacked through such flexibility, creativity and taking of responsibility and not through opening or shutting schools. Whatever type it is, a school can and must contribute to dealing with the issue.

Aggressive closing of other people's schools, which those people think are important, would certainly be experienced by that group as an attack on something that people do not understand. On the other side, if there is a failure to be honest about some of the issues that children are facing, that should legitimately be confronted as something that we must tackle.

We wanted to take the issue head on and say clearly that it will not be solved by shutting schools and forcing people somewhere else. It will be solved by people taking it seriously and developing practical steps that they can take to address the experiences that people are having and to create new relationships.

Dr Rosie: Schools are an incredibly complex and sensitive matter that draws together the issues of difference and hostility that we have discussed. Some people fear the difference because they think that it leads to hostility, and some people regard any wish to change the difference as an attack and are therefore hostile to it. This is the issue on which people light the touchpaper and run away, because people often rush to defensive positions.

Some people who are told that sectarianism is a problem but who do not necessarily experience it in their lives are looking for a culprit. Duncan Morrow talks about a silver bullet and I talk about a whodunnit, which reflects the different television shows that we watch. People say that we have this bad thing—sectarianism—and they ask who or what is responsible for it. Many people worry that Catholic schools in Scotland create an institutional sense of difference. However, we said that, if the country got rid of the denominational school system now, that probably would not make one iota of difference to sectarianism.

There is a debate to be had about how we organise schools in this country. Duncan Morrow used the phrase "splendid isolation." We should not have any schools in splendid isolation—schools belong to the communities that they are within. Regardless of whether they are denominational or non-denominational schools, we should encourage them to come together and work together.

I do not think that we can have a debate on schools at the moment because, in a sense, the issue is too sensitive. People will rush to defend their positions, some of which can be seen as attacking other positions. Disagreement is fine and difference is great, and if a report can, in some way, contribute to people talking about these things in a way that enables them to explain why they have the positions that they have, we can collectively reach a position in which we can say that one position or another is poorly informed and we can explain why we do things in certain ways and why we feel uncomfortable about certain other ways of doing things. That will enable us to move to a position in which we can have difference without hostility.

I was going to say that education is a blue touchpaper that can be lit, but when you work in this area, you have to be careful about what colours you talk about, so I will describe it as a beige touchpaper.

Dr Morrow: It would be great if there were a scapegoat or if we could find somebody who is responsible for the situation, because that would mean we could get rid of the problem in an instant. However, it is not going to work like that. The relationships that we are talking about come out of our history, and we are going to have to move to tackle them.

There is a willingness and an appetite to admit that sectarianism is inappropriate in the 21st century but, in schools, we must take a subtle position. We think that schools can do a lot and that the focus should not be on shutting one school or opening another. Where we have opportunities, we need to start taking them and building on them.

The message that needs to go out from us is that this is a really fruitful area in which we can begin to change things. We would like there to be engagement with Education Scotland and the school providers in order to find ways of maximising the opportunities for change.

We have tried to support youth intervention, not because we think that young people are the problem but because we need developments and models. A lot of the work is around how we can do things rather than whether we want things done. The reason for the money over the three-year period is to try to do something in that regard.

As best as possible, we have put in evaluation and support mechanisms, with an eye to having a long legacy. We have tried to develop tools and put in place examples of best practice that can be built on and can make a difference over time. That is the big legacy. In the area of schools and young people there are many creative things that can be done and are being done in some places. The issue is about building on that.

The Convener: Would you say that an example of possible good practice would involve councils considering having shared campuses when they are rebuilding schools, wherever possible, in order to help start breaking down those barriers within the community and with children?

Dr Morrow: Certainly, people in education departments should constantly ask whether the way in which they handle their schools policy engages with any local issue of sectarianism. Whether that involves a shared campus in any given setting is another question. The principle is that we have to tackle sectarianism. If we get overly prescriptive about how to do that, we get into danger.

I would like the education departments and the school authorities to be able to explain what they are doing with more specificity, and for them to be able to point to what they are doing. I do not want the situation to involve either them saying simply, "We are against sectarianism," or us saying, "You must have a shared campus, even though it might not work in this setting." Instead, we want to say to people that they need to be able to demonstrate to us where the interventions happen within the life of a child from four or five to 18, and how those

interventions will ensure that the child will not end up at 18 with the idea that there is a "them" and an "us" in the local community. If we can begin to trace that and make that an obligation on those who are responsible for education and for thinking about the care of children, that will be a huge step forward.

Dr Rosie: My starting point would be to say that shared campuses are a possible thing that local authorities can do, but I would ask what the purpose of having a shared campus is. If the purpose is simply to save money by, for instance, sharing playing fields at different times of the day, that is not really a great way forward.

Leaving aside the issues of denominational schools or non-denominational schools and thinking about schools in general, I support the idea of bringing together children from different social backgrounds so that they can do things together in a way that enables them to understand that Scotland is made up of different kinds of people. That would be a good thing.

Some wonderful work is going on in that regard. Duncan Morrow mentioned sense over sectarianism, great work is being done with Citizens Theatre around "Divided City", and further good work is being done in Inverclyde with regard to getting kids from different backgrounds together to do fun stuff and to learn from each other.

If shared campuses can contribute to that, that is a good thing, but it must be done within the broader context of bringing people together and getting across the message that difference is a good thing to be celebrated rather than something that we should be worried about.

The Convener: We are quite tight for time. Christian Allard has a question—can you make it a short one?

Christian Allard: Yes, convener.

If I understand you correctly, you are saying that shared campuses would be a good thing, but you do not always want to have them, for the reasons that you mention.

Dr Morrow: Yes.

Christian Allard: Is that approach to be applied to every other issue? Is the idea that we do not want to highlight the feeling of them and us, but instead dissipate the idea that there are two camps in society, whatever society that is?

Dr Rosie: I would start by saying that there are many potential camps in society, not only around religion but also around class. Our schools are segregated by class, not just in the sense that some are private schools and some are state schools but also with regard to their locations. We know that we live in a society in which people are segregated on the basis of their social background.

I want there to be lots more mixing among schools in general. Shared campuses might be one way to do that, but they are not the only way. Indeed, sometimes, they are not the best way.

Christian Allard: You are saying that it would be wrong to have them just for that reason.

Dr Rosie: I think that it is not good enough just to have a shared campus and leave it at that. Much more must be done. Shared campuses are one way in which to facilitate the broader aim, but just having them is not enough.

Dr Morrow: We think that shared campuses are a hugely innovative and important innovation. It is probably a mistake to turn the initiative into the thing that everyone must do all the time but, at the same time, we need to maximise the opportunities we have. If shared campuses become something that can be a model and a lead, let us go for it.

The Convener: I visited a primary school that has a shared campus. All the children came together at playtime, and they came together for other reasons as well. I thought that it was an excellent model.

Dr Morrow: Leadership in the schools can be decisive in that regard.

The Convener: Indeed.

Thank you for an interesting report and an interesting morning. That concludes the public part of today's meeting. Our next meeting will take place on Thursday 6 March and will include oral evidence on our inquiry into fathers and parenting.

11:13

Meeting continued in private until 11:39.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

Available in e-format only. Printed Scottish Parliament documentation is published in Edinburgh by APS Group Scotland.

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

For details of documents available to
order in hard copy format, please contact:
APS Scottish Parliament Publications on 0131 629 9941.

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78392-764-7

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78392-781-4

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland