



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 6 March 2014

Thursday 6 March 2014

CONTENTS

FATHERS AND PARENTING	Col. 1845
------------------------------------	------------------

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
4th 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:

Kenny Drysdale

Norman Fraser

Allan Kidd

Peter McGhee

Victor Quested

Allan Reddick

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Thornton

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 6 March 2014

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:05]

Fathers and Parenting

The Convener (Margaret McCulloch): Welcome to the fourth meeting in 2014 of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I ask everyone to turn off their electronic devices or set them to flight mode.

Today's only agenda item is an evidence-taking session for our fathers and parenting inquiry. We will start the session with some introductions. At the table, we have our clerking and research team, the official reporters and broadcasting services. Around the room we are supported by security. I also welcome a number of observers in the public gallery.

I am Margaret McCulloch, the committee's convener. I invite members and witnesses to introduce themselves, starting on my right.

Allan Reddick: I am 30 and I have two kids. I am from Hamilton.

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

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

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

Kenny Drysdale: I am the father of three children aged eight, six and four this month.

Peter McGhee: I am the father of an 18-month-old child.

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

Victor Qusted: I am the father of two children, aged six and five.

Norman Fraser: I am from Hamilton and I am the father of three children. My wife is expecting in April, so hopefully there will be four soon.

Allan Kidd: Good morning. I am a father of identical twin girls who are 23 months old. I also have a stepson, who is 12.

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

The Convener: I will start the questioning. If anyone wishes to answer, they should indicate as much to me or the clerks.

How were decisions about paternity leave and primary care made when you had your children? Was it automatically assumed that the child's or children's mother would take full maternity leave or did any of you consider using additional paternity leave?

Allan Reddick: When my first child was born, it was automatically assumed that my wife would take full maternity leave. As a teacher, I was actively encouraged to take my paternity leave during the school holidays so that it would not impact on my work. The same happened when my second child was born; I was actively encouraged to take my two weeks' paternity leave during the Easter holidays.

Allan Kidd: The agency that I work for had no enhanced rates for paternity leave. Because my wife was expecting twins, she was off work much longer before the children arrived. At that point, she was down to statutory maternity pay. As a result, I took three weeks' annual leave from my entitlement to ensure that the same level of income came into the household. I took no paternity leave. Although it was available, it was not affordable.

Kenny Drysdale: I have had paternity leave with different employers. Although I have had no problems with getting the leave, I took paternity leave and holidays because of the financial implications. If you are off for two weeks, it makes a big difference.

The Convener: You said that you were with different employers when you took paternity leave. Did you find that there were different attitudes towards your taking time off?

Kenny Drysdale: No, both employers were really supportive and there was no problem with taking the time off.

Marco Biagi: Have other people in similar situations in your workplaces made the same choices as you have? I see that the witnesses are nodding.

The Convener: If childcare had been more affordable, would you have made different decisions?

Allan Reddick: When my first daughter was born, we put her into childcare but it became too expensive. My wife ended up having to quit her job and working only at weekends. Had there been affordable childcare, we would probably have split the maternity leave between the two of us. I feel that I missed out. I do not know whether it is just the job that I am in but I was encouraged not to

take as much leave as I probably should have taken.

Allan Kidd: Because we have twins, childcare is much more expensive. My wife went back to work two days a week—a Sunday, when I was off, and a Monday, when we had to pay for a nursery placement. A half-day a week costs us more than £200 a month for our two daughters. If we had decided to put them into nursery five days a week, it would have cost us £1,400 a month, which is more than my wife earned in her full-time position. Clearly, there is no way that we could have afforded that.

Peter McGhee: My situation is similar to that of Allan Kidd. My wife and I work full-time but all of my wife's wage would have gone on childcare costs. I should also note that we could not survive without granny.

Kenny Drysdale: With our first child, my wife did not want to work because she wanted to spend time with the child, and we had agreed that she did not have to work. However, when the second one came along, I am afraid that that became non-viable financially.

The Convener: Do you feel that, because of the circumstances, you might have missed out on the opportunity to spend more time with your children when they were younger?

Allan Kidd: No. Although there was no financial provision for enhanced paternity rates, my employer recognised that my wife giving birth to twins was a huge deal. The managing director, who is my direct line manager, was more than flexible and accommodating, and said, "Take whatever time you need. Come in late. Go home early. If there's an issue at home—if the kids are not well or your wife needs support—just go home." Although the paternity rates were very poor, the flexibility was great.

The Convener: That is excellent.

Allan Reddick: I had the exact opposite experience; my employer would not let me away for anything. I missed my youngest daughter's first day at nursery, and I have missed every nativity that she has done. I miss everything and I feel that my wife gets much more one-to-one time with the kids than I do.

The Convener: That is a shame.

Alex Johnstone: I wonder whether we can dig just a wee bit deeper into this issue, given the contrast between the experiences of the two Allans, which in some respects are rather opposite. I do not want to know who your employers are, but are we talking about the difference between the experience in the public and private sectors?

Allan Kidd: Yes. I work for a third sector, not-for-profit agency.

Allan Reddick: I work in education.

Alex Johnstone: Does anyone else feel that the type of employer characterises the way in which they are treated or is it a bit more random than that?

Kenny Drysdale: Yes. Your employer can mean big differences in your ability to attend key family events. Sometimes it comes down to the job that you are doing. For example, in health and social care, where I have worked and had responsibilities for the people whom I was supporting, you might work one Christmas on, one Christmas off.

Peter McGhee: Like Allan Kidd, I work for a third sector organisation. Because of the people whom we work with, we know the situation for hectic families. My wife works for the private sector and she finds it very difficult even to take holidays. I am very fortunate in having a flexibility that my wife does not have.

Allan Kidd: Our situation might have been different if we had not had twins. Going to things requires two people, particularly when they are babies, and you do not know what the situation will be like when you get there. My employer was very much tuned in to and supported that. Other colleagues have children and they, too, get to go to various events, but I think that my employer showed a bit more discretion in my case.

10:15

John Mason: I do not know how long you have been working—you do not need to tell us your age—but do you think that attitudes have changed over time and that employers are a bit friendlier towards fathers now?

Allan Kidd: Yes. Having worked for the same organisation for 16 years now, I remember that, when I first joined, its attitude towards people who needed time away for things to do with their children was very much that it could not allow or manage that. Over time, however, the organisation's managers and directors have come to feel that they need to support their young fathers and mothers because they do a lot for the organisation, which operates a 24/7 residential school and fostering service. The directors and managers are now in tune with what happens to children and young people. Given that those who work for the organisation are out of their homes during the night and every day of the week, I think that it has decided over the years that, as a payback, it can be more flexible with its people.

Marco Biagi: Do any of the witnesses work in a private sector organisation, or do you all work in the public or third sector?

Kenny Drysdale: I have worked in the third sector for a charitable organisation.

Marco Biagi: Okay, but most of you work in the public sector.

You are here because you have been involved as fathers and are—I presume—almost the exemplary fathers who want to go to things but run into difficulties. Have you come up against not just practical difficulties at work but attitudes from people who think, “This is a bit strange” or, “Why are you doing this? Shouldn’t it be the mother?”

Peter McGhee: I apologise for maybe lowering the tone of the committee, but my wife and I have made it a point that, when our child needs to be changed in a restaurant, I do it. I still have to go into female changing rooms or disabled toilets to do that and I can see the looks that I get when I pick up the changing bag.

Allan Kidd: I have gone to every group, class and provision, such as baby massage and antenatal and postnatal groups. The antenatal stuff is well attended by couples, but I was very much in the minority in going to lots of the postnatal classes. I was met with shock; people said, “Oh—there’s a dad here. What’s that about?”

Peter McGhee: My experience is similar to Allan Kidd’s with postnatal care. My application to go to breastfeeding support sessions that the local health board runs was refused. That was a point-blank refusal, so I could not offer my wife support for that.

Kenny Drysdale: I attended all the classes before the children were born. As for classes afterwards, there are big issues—postnatal depression, for example—that fathers should maybe understand better. Fathers are also under pressure in a lot of ways. More could be done on that aspect of support.

Christian Allard: I like the attitude of Peter McGhee and his wife, who are really trying to change people’s attitudes. That is fantastic. You said that you get some looks from people. Does your wife get such looks as well because she is not taking the kids to get changed?

Peter McGhee: Sometimes—yes. I am thick-skinned and I do not care if people want to look. I feel as if I am doing well, but people have asked my wife, “Why are you not doing it?”

Victor Quested: I am unique in the sense that I have the children and have had them since my youngest was one. I feel that I am discriminated against. I cannot access many things because I am a lone dad. Every club that I go to generally

has mothers and toddlers—albeit that they have grown up a bit. However, even now, I feel that people have a stereotyped view of what women’s role is, and I am not supported at all.

The Convener: Will you give us examples of where you feel that you have been discriminated against?

Victor Quested: That happened most recently at the jobcentre. The situation is difficult at the moment for me because of the pressure that I feel from the jobcentre. It has suggested that it will stop my money if I do not do more job searches, although I am bringing up two children, I am at college twice a week and I do voluntary work for charities.

The pressure is unbelievable. The jobcentre has told me that it has lone-parent advisers, but they do not know what to do with me, because most of the jobs are geared up for women who will work part time. They cannot accommodate me to drop off and pick up my children. It is just so unfair.

The advisers keep pointing me to Mumsnet. I am not against that at all, but I often think that, if it was the other way about, there would be a big fight. Mumsnet is a good site, which I am not embarrassed to say that I use, but I have never contacted it and said that I am a dad. It is a good site but, everywhere that I go, I feel isolated. Even in the playground, people look at me. That is not a nice situation to be in.

The Convener: Do you feel that mums do not welcome you? Do you feel isolated from that group of parents as well?

Victor Quested: Yes. I go on every school trip, but I have even had children asking me why I do not work. They say things like, “Where’s the children’s mummy?”

The Convener: If you were to find a job, you would have problems with childcare.

Victor Quested: I would. Because of the circumstances of me having the children, we have moved four times in their little lives. I was working and I tried to keep a job going, but eventually I had to give up work, because it was no longer practical and it was not fair on the children.

The Convener: Will you remind us how old your children are?

Victor Quested: They are five and six.

John Finnie: Peter McGhee mentioned something about a health board. Did you complain about that? Did you raise it with anyone?

Peter McGhee: Yes—we did that at the time, but the issue has still not been taken further.

John Finnie: That is interesting.

Allan Reddick: I have had experiences that are similar to Victor Quested's. I take my daughters to dancing and I took them to mums and tums, baby bounce and all that. Nobody speaks to the only dad in the room; not even the people who run the class speak to that person. Nobody speaks to the dad, and the mums and the leaders are cliquey. Dads feel out of place and think, "I shouldn't be here. This isn't for me. This is supposed to be for my wife."

We decided that I would take my daughters to all those things because I did not get the baby bit. However, I felt really put out and that I should not be there, which is a horrible feeling. I am not as thick-skinned as Peter McGhee—I take everything to heart. It is horrible and it makes me not want to go.

The Convener: Have you continued going to mums and kids groups?

Allan Reddick: I have stopped going to them. I take my daughters just to their playgroup and to dancing. I do not go to anything else now.

The Convener: Have others experienced that isolation when going to events with children?

Norman Fraser: My experiences are similar. At bounce and rhymes, or whatever it is called, at the local library, I get some strange looks from others, as if to say, "Why aren't you at work?" or, "What're you doing here?" The women tend to be cliquey.

The Convener: You are not invited to join them for coffee and a blether or anything like that.

Norman Fraser: Not really—no.

The Convener: That is sad.

Peter McGhee: I have brought up before the breastfeeding support from the health board. However, in the voluntary group that my wife attends, the women have been welcoming; they slag me off regularly because I go, but they do it lovingly, it has to be said.

Kenny Drysdale: The situation is different. Before our relationship ended, I did the school run most of the time. Not doing the school run means missing out on the interaction and all the friends—the networking with the kids and their families. Of the parents whom I met through the school, few have been in touch with me since my wife and I separated. That is a huge part of the social network. People's lives totally change.

Marco Biagi: Some groups—although not many—are targeted mainly or wholly at dads. Has any of you been pointed towards one?

The Convener: Victor Quested wants to come in; does anyone else want to comment?

Marco Biagi: What groups are you aware of?

Victor Quested: Gilmerton child and family centre pointed me to the dads club, but I had to take two buses to get there, so it was a bit of a stress.

If we have separate clubs for dads and mums, we will never move forward. People should accept dads as part of a mixed club. There are clubs out there for dads but, if clubs were more open and welcomed mums and dads, it would be more acceptable for dads to be seen with their children.

The Convener: So mums and toddlers groups, mums crèches and other such groups could change their names so that they are more open to both parents.

Christian Allard: The witnesses have spoken about interaction with mothers. What about interaction with your children's friends? Do you have the same problem?

Victor Quested: I am sorry; I cannot hear—you are too far away.

Christian Allard: I am sorry about that. You have spoken about your difficult experiences in meeting mothers. Do you have the same difficulties when—or if—you meet the friends of your children? What about those of you who are fathers of grown-up children? Mothers interact with other mothers and their children interact with other mothers' children, and there are friends of the family whom they invite to their house. Do you have that contact with the friends of your children?

The Convener: Do you mix with friends who have children? Do you have that type of social group or do you feel that you are quite isolated?

Norman Fraser: I feel quite isolated. It is hard for me to have much social contact when I am trying to look after three young children, and I have a son with autism, so there are added responsibilities. I feel quite socially isolated at times.

Christian Allard: I will be more direct. Do you know any of your children's friends?

Victor Quested: I struggle with the fact that none of my children's friends ever comes to my house, because I am a lone dad. I do not know why, but that is frowned on. I run a lot of clubs that involve schools from different areas, and people who attend them and who know me come to my house, but nobody from my children's school does. That is unfair on my children.

The Convener: Does any other single parent, or any father who watches the kids during the day, encounter the same problem?

Allan Kidd: My situation is slightly different. I have a stepson who is 12 going on 13, and his father lives in the next town. The father has regular access to his son—our communications

are good and we all get on well. My stepson has sleepovers, and his friends from school go to his father's house and come to our house. His father is a lone parent with just his son there, but that is not a major barrier to other children going to their house. I do not know whether that is to do with age, as my stepson is older now, but there are plenty of sleepovers and a lot of contact.

Kenny Drysdale: I concur with Victor Quested—there are different aspects. I have friends whose children have been brought up alongside my children, and there are no problems there with sleepovers. However, with regard to my youngest daughter, I can see why the situation that has been described can happen. If I phone the mother of one of my daughter's friends and ask whether her daughter wants to come around when I am there, that might cause awkwardness, perhaps on the part of her husband—I do not know. It can cause problems, and it denies children in that position the opportunity to network and socialise with their peer group in the way that we would like them to.

10:30

The Convener: Is the financial aspect of joining clubs and so on problematic for single parents on limited incomes who are not working? Is that a barrier to you mixing with other people and your children interacting with other children?

Victor Quested: That has not really affected me. I am unemployed now but, before, I did not get very involved with clubs because, as we have said, it is difficult for a dad to go into a club. Now, a lot of things are out there, if people can source them. There are a lot of free clubs. The only club that I pay for costs £50 a month, which is for both my children to do tae kwon do.

John Mason: My impression is that people have had a mixture of experiences with employers and that some are more supportive than others. When we did the women and work inquiry, that was also the case—I felt that the bigger organisations had more of a plan in place and were able to cover things, whereas smaller employers sometimes struggled a bit more.

Is it just a question of employers changing their attitudes? From what Allan Reddick said, it sounded a bit more like, although the rules are in place, he was discouraged from taking advantage of his rights, which means that changing the rules will not do much good. Alternatively, is it the case that rules need to be changed and that the Government has to tell employers to get their act together? When I talk about employers, I am talking also about the Department for Work and Pensions, which is involved in the area of work.

The Convener: Does anyone want to comment? As Allan Reddick is sitting right beside me, I will pick on him.

Allan Reddick: I do not know whether what is required is as much a change in rules as a change in attitudes. I have spoken about being encouraged to take my paternity leave during the holidays, but females get to take their maternity leave and to claim back every holiday that they missed as a result of not being at work during that period. It is not right that the situations for males and females should be so different.

Changing the rules would not be as helpful as hammering home the point that there must be a change in attitudes. The father and mother both have rights as parents, and there should be the same opportunities for both of us.

John Mason: How do we change those attitudes? Do we need to write to all the schools in Scotland and tell them to get their act together? Will the situation just change over time? If we leave it alone for 10 years, will it be okay?

Allan Reddick: I do not have an answer. I do not know.

John Mason: Okay—I accept that.

Christian Allard: Is the issue more about organisations—the employers—or the people who work with you, such as your direct manager?

Allan Reddick: I work for the council, and its rules are implemented by our headteacher, who interprets those rules to determine what can and cannot be done. It might be because I work in education that I see many grey areas. We need to have people in front of a class, and there are financial impacts from that. I do not know the answer; I have given my general position.

Kenny Drysdale: I look at the issue in a different way. One of the big issues that affects everything is the primary carer role. If the mother is the primary carer, a huge raft of things is directed at her and the father is excluded from that. That covers everything—legal issues, education issues and so on.

John Mason: How can we change that? Can we do anything, or do we just allow society to change over time?

Kenny Drysdale: The primary carer role has to be changed. The father and mother are both parents and have the same concerns about and ambitions for their children. At the moment, my concern is about my children's education, which we might come on to.

The primary carer role has to be equal from start to finish. If it is not, that builds boundaries and barriers.

John Mason: I am sorry to press you, but do you think that the issue is just tradition and the way in which people think?

Kenny Drysdale: I think that it is tradition. Legally, there are huge implications—the whole spectrum of issues seems to be covered.

Allan Reddick: Little things can be done. The leaflets that people pick up at the doctor's surgery or even at prenatal and postnatal classes always have pictures of mums with kids. I have struggled to find one with a picture of a dad in a positive role. Little things such as that need to change, because they embed in society the picture that the mum is the primary caregiver. Little things can start to change and, in that way, society's impression will start to change.

The Convener: That is an excellent visual example of how we can change things.

Allan Kidd: To pick up on Allan Reddick's point, my experience of antenatal classes was that the midwife gave excellent presentations and classes, but she said something that stuck with me. When we had the lesson on feeding, whether it was formula or breastfeeding, she said, "The fathers don't really need to bother about this, because there's plenty for you to do at the other end—you'll be changing the nappies." Aye—very good.

To pick up on John Mason's point about culture and attitudes in the workplace, there are two issues for me. One is the affordability of paternity leave and time off. I work for quite a small agency, which is affected by things that are happening in the culture of children's services. Because local authorities do not have lots of money to pay for placements and longer-term services for youngsters, our income has been reduced. The challenge for our organisation is affordability. Can it afford to pay enhanced rates for paternity leave or other leave that might be available for fathers under legislation?

On the other side, I have adjusted my hours to look after our two girls on a Monday morning, because of the cost of childcare. I now work half a day on a Monday and I do the rest of the hours at other times of the week. That is flexible and it is up to me. On Friday, I was in Glasgow, so I left at half past 7 and made up some time. We monitor the situation in that way. My organisation is doing what it can within the resources that are available to it. A much wider economic argument is involved.

John Mason: I suspect that you see other employers, although you do not work for them. Are other employers not as sympathetic as yours?

Allan Kidd: Other employers are probably not as sympathetic. I have a good relationship with my employer and I have been with it for a long time

and throughout the journey of our children coming into being. I will not go into the details, but we had in vitro fertilisation treatment, which took a long time. Our employer was engaged in that and supported us well through giving us time off for appointments. For example, at some points, we were in and out of hospital three times a week for weeks on end, but no one said, "You'll need to make that time back." People said, "Of course you can go—do you need the rest of the day off?" They asked, "Is it too traumatic?" or, "Are you all right?" That was a protracted situation. My employer was probably more sympathetic and flexible because of the situation and because I have twins.

The Convener: We will move on to healthcare and education, with questions from Alex Johnstone.

Alex Johnstone: I will have to pick my way through this, because we have discussed some of the issues already. Do parents use parental leave effectively and share responsibility? How do parents decide how to use parental leave or time off work to deal with educational or healthcare issues? Does it happen on the basis of need or availability? Is there a plan, or is it almost accidental?

Allan Kidd: It is accidental in the sense that we just wait and see. It is just whatever is happening at the time. My wife works only on Sunday and Monday and she is with our children full time for the rest of the week, so it is much easier for us to decide how it happens. If the appointment means that one of us has to go to the doctor and one has to stay at home, I will make arrangements to come home from work with the support of my employer.

Allan Reddick: We decided early on that I would continue to work and my wife left her job and picked up weekend work instead, so if anything comes up Monday to Friday, she deals with it. However, that decision was made much earlier. It was not a case-by-case decision. We decided early on and she gave up her work to work weekends so that she would be there Monday to Friday for all those issues.

Alex Johnstone: Did anybody else have a plan?

Kenny Drysdale: I would concur. We do what we organise. I am quite lucky because I work from home and can organise my diary. Now that we are separated, if we need to go to appointments, we get organised and we do it.

Alex Johnstone: We have got through an awful lot, but there is a point that I would like to develop slightly. I knew a young man who was a primary school teacher; that was his career of choice. He found himself leaving that profession because he did not fit into what was an essentially female

environment. I am beginning to get the feeling that quite a bit of that is going on, and I want to know whether the experience of someone who was on school staff is similar to the experiences of the witnesses in educational establishments. Do you think that men are viewed with suspicion?

Kenny Drysdale: My children have been out of school for 33 weeks. I distinctly remember hearing on the BBC of a member of the armed services who took his children out of school for two weeks being fined £900. My children have been out of school for 33 weeks now. My wife has been turned down by the school group manager on two occasions. She appealed to Lothian education department and was turned down. I am told that there is a loophole in the legislation.

The relationship with the headteacher and the school group manager has been excellent, but when it comes to getting feedback and basic correspondence from some departments, I have found it to be embarrassing, to be honest.

Alex Johnstone: Why are you experiencing that difficulty?

Kenny Drysdale: It has just been about timelines. Midlothian Council's children and families department has asked me to phone East Lothian. I have phoned on numerous occasions and not heard anything back. We have reverted to solicitors' letters. I just find it incredible.

Because my wife is the primary carer and has moved from Midlothian to East Lothian, and there is this loophole in the legislation, either she has to be reassessed or the children have to be enrolled in the local primary school. In this day and age, I find that incredible. I have got to pay the bills and I am now paying my wife for my children to be out of school. It is exhausting.

Alex Johnstone: Do you think that there is any relevance to the way in which you manage your family and time in that situation, or is it a separate problem that is a burden on your mind at the moment?

Kenny Drysdale: Once you are in this position, you cannot get out of it. I have worked since I was 16 and put everything into the house. It is not about the money, because the house is a home and a place that you need for your children. It is my workplace as well. If you lose your house—I went and stayed at my parents' house for seven or eight months—and if you are not the primary carer, you find that your children are used as tools for manipulation, and it is just a spiral that is absolutely exhausting.

Also, when we talk about finances for solicitors, anyone who is earning is caught in a trap. We have to pay money for advice and, quite frankly, I

would rather give it to someone who is homeless in the street.

10:45

The Convener: Thanks for that very honest answer to the question. Your response crystallises the difficulties that a lot of single parents experience. I was going to ask, but it is probably a rhetorical question, whether mothers in the same situation as yourself would experience the same lack of support if the father had the children.

Kenny Drysdale: There is a dilemma, because I was desperate for my wife to stay in the house and for the children to attend school, where they have security, but once the security of the school goes, it comes down to new policies such as getting it right for every child. GIRFEC means that not only the school but the local community should pick up on problems. Now that my children are out of school, who monitors them? Their education does not need to be assessed and nobody goes in to see them.

The Convener: In the situation that you are in now, you do not have a say about whether your children are home schooled or go to school.

Kenny Drysdale: I work in health and social care and support people in lots of organisations to ensure that they understand and are aware of their responsibilities for reporting on different forms of abuse—I am talking not about serious abuse but about small things, such as coercion or whatever. We apparently cannot get the fundamentals right about someone's children being taken out of school. I agreed for my children to be taken out of school to be home schooled if my partner could put a curriculum in place and demonstrate an ability to home school them, but she refused to do that. I have found that it is not just me—there is an entire home schooling network. I do not mind if people want to pay for home schooling, but if they want to do it and not pay for it—

The Convener: It came across clearly that in that situation your say is very limited.

Kenny Drysdale: The school group manager has been excellent. When we were making the decisions, he said, "Kenny, the decision is not made in your interest or in your partner's interest; it is made in the best interests of the children." That should be the case all the way down. Decisions should be made not in the mother's interest or in the father's interest but in the best interests of the children. Professional people need to sit down as a group with parents and work out what is in the best interests of the children.

I am paying half the balance of the house that I purchased to maintain it and I am being told that, if I go down the legal route, it could cost me two

grand to get into court plus 10 grand—and we are talking about mediation with somebody who I cannot agree with about education. It is a shambles, to be honest.

Alex Johnstone: Before we leave the subject of education, I think that Victor Quested or Peter McGhee—I cannot remember which—said when they were in the middle of an answer that we would maybe come back to education later. I would love to know what they were going to say. Can you remember?

The Convener: That is quite unfair, Alex—that is a shame.

John Finnie: Like a lot of my colleagues, I find that much of what I was going to ask has been covered. I was going to ask about official attitudes rather than society's attitude in general. I am sure that local authorities and health boards have wonderful policies—perhaps they are laminated and pinned to a wall or are gathering dust in a wonderful folder on a shelf somewhere—but they mean nothing if they are not put into practice. There is perhaps a role for the committee to ensure that that is done.

From what our witnesses have said, there is clearly a wide range of experiences. Kenny Drysdale mentioned GIRFEC, which is often misrepresented, but clearly the interests of the child should always be paramount. Has that featured in any of the issues that have arisen for others? Have you heard of the concept of getting it right for every child?

Peter McGhee: I am aware of the GIRFEC legislation, although I have not looked into it in great detail. As Kenny Drysdale said, we should do what is best for the child. We felt that breastfeeding support was not available. At the prenatal and postnatal classes that I attended, there was no support for me as a father to support my wife to breastfeed—she had to go through that herself. I had a lot of questions.

John Finnie: Was that approach explained to you?

Peter McGhee: No.

John Finnie: Did you ask about that?

Peter McGhee: I did. As I said, I was told that men do not go to the breastfeeding group. That was what it came down to. I asked why not and I was told that other mothers might not feel comfortable. On occasions, we were told that we had to formula feed our child. I have no qualms about saying that one nurse at Wishaw general hospital, who had been given a certificate in breastfeeding from UNICEF, told us that, if we did not formula feed our baby, we would starve it.

John Finnie: We have a challenge to avoid going too deeply into individual cases; we are interested in the generality.

Everyone around the table has different experiences. Is anyone involved in fathers groups or advocacy groups? Kenny Drysdale has alluded to a network.

Kenny Drysdale: My main focus is my job, and I have the kids for three out of four weekends. That affects my energy levels and ability to take part in groups. I have looked at Fathers 4 Justice. A lot of energy has to be put in to find out what is needed for things. As for other groups, just by networking this morning, I have heard of Dads Rock, which I had never heard of before. Perhaps I have not done enough research, but nothing has jumped out at me. I am focused on keeping everything else going.

The Convener: The committee has visited fathers groups, which we found really beneficial. Perhaps a few of the people who are here could say how they found out about fathers groups and what they get from them.

Allan Reddick: We went to a fun day in Hamilton last year, where we were approached by SPELL—Support for Play & Early Learning in Lanarkshire—which is an organisation in South Lanarkshire, about a dads-only group. Peter McGhee, Norman Fraser and I attend that every Saturday and we now run it. Before that, there was nothing that was solely for fathers. My kids love going to the group and I love talking to other dads about their experiences. That is why I now take an active role in the group.

The group gets support from the council, but it is still discriminated against. For example, we are the only group that pays rent for the use of the hall—mums groups do not pay that. We are told that that is not discrimination, but I beg to differ.

Since I started going to the group, I feel that my relationship with my kids is much better. I now see them interacting with other kids and I interact with other dads who have had the same experiences as I have had. It is much better now.

The Convener: What do other people who go to that fathers group get from it?

Peter McGhee: I echo what Allan Reddick said. There was nothing before. I found out about the group from a poster in a community centre and I went along. I feel that I now have a better relationship with my child because I spend that quality time with her. I was also fairly new to the area, so it was good for me to get out and network with other fathers who were facing the same issues. It is good to have a sounding board. My wife had her support networks through the breastfeeding support group that she went to, but I

did not have that, so it was good to get something for myself as well.

The Convener: Norman Fraser, you go to the group as well, do you not?

Norman Fraser: Yes, I attend the group. I find it beneficial, because I get to spend some quality time with my children in a safe and relaxed environment, and it is good to meet other dads in the area. I am quite new to Hamilton and have been there for only two years, so it is nice to meet new people.

The Convener: That is great. Do any members have any other questions, or have we covered everything?

Marco Biagi: The importance of granny was touched on briefly earlier. Do the witnesses share that view about the need to fall back on extended family, whether that is grandparents, uncles or whatever?

Norman Fraser: Because I do not know a lot of people in the area, I rely on my mother to baby-sit quite a lot, which is hard, because she lives in Duns in the Borders, so I have to get her up to do that. My wife's mother lives in the Netherlands, so it is obviously quite hard to get her over.

Marco Biagi: I can imagine you asking, "Can you mind the kids for an evening?" and being told, "Sorry, I'm in Amsterdam."

Peter McGhee: As I said, we could not operate without granny being close by. It also has a positive effect on her, because she had a long-term health condition, but now she blossoms when she sees the wean. Trying to get her back off her granny is sometimes a problem, but financially we could not cope without that help. However, my mother-in-law is now getting hassled to go back to employment. She is 50-something—I had better watch what I am saying—and we now have to consider how best to deal with childcare if she did return to employment, because we do not have the means to go part time and she offers a lot of support.

I feel that my child gets more out of not being in nursery, to be honest, because she is interacting with people. My mother-in-law takes her to places such as museums and Bilco's soft play. My child has blossomed, but granny has also blossomed.

The Convener: That is lovely.

Allan Reddick: We rely heavily on my mother-in-law, not for childcare but for little things. For example, she will come down of an afternoon to pick my eldest up from nursery, so that we do not have to get my youngest daughter, who is only 10 months old, suited and booted and out to the nursery to pick up the older one. It is wee things such as that that make a bigger difference than

having her watch them overnight or on certain days. It is the constant little things that make a difference.

Christian Allard: You have talked about support that you get from your family, and I want to look a little bit deeper into that, particularly the relationship with family members from older generations. How do they feel about you wanting to be as active a dad as your partner or wife is a mother? How do they feel about you wanting to take such a prominent role in the education and raising of your children?

Allan Reddick: My parents and my grandparents find it strange that I would even consider changing a nappy or taking my daughters to playgroup, because they see that as mum's job and wonder why I am doing it. When I was out shopping with my family, I took my daughter to get her nappy changed and I got disapproving looks from my dad, as if to say, "She's standing there. Why is she not doing it?" It is odd. They look at me as if I am a weirdo for wanting to take such an active role.

11:00

Allan Kidd: I would say the direct opposite of what Allan Reddick has just said. My folks and my wife's mother are encouraging and supportive of the role that I play with my daughters, particularly at the weekend, when my wife is working. We call Sunday "Daddy's flying solo day". We will visit my mum and dad or my mother-in-law, but I would not expect them to change nappies or do anything like that—that is what I do and they let me get on with it. My dad would be horrified if I asked him to change a nappy, but it is not an issue. They are very encouraging. A couple of times, my mother has said, "Well, you wanted them."

The Convener: So they are your responsibility.

Kenny Drysdale: My parents have been absolutely amazing with the kids, but nappies would not be part of my father's jurisdiction. I have changed the nappies of all three from start to finish, and that is good.

The Convener: That is lovely to hear.

Christian Allard: Having fulfilled a role that was traditionally the role of mothers, do you feel a bit different now about the role of women in society as mothers, including that of single mothers? Has your attitude changed?

Allan Kidd: In our household, there has been a distinct change from the roles that my parents played when they were my age. There was job demarcation—mum cooked, cleaned and kept the house while dad kept the garden and the car and went off to work. When my wife and I set up home, it easily became more of a team situation in which

we would both cook and do bits of DIY—in fact, she is much better at DIY than I am. We share tasks rather than have job demarcation.

I do not know whether that reflects a change in culture between the generations or whether the fact that women now go out to work more and have a more equal status has changed the perception of those roles. Our friends are very much the same—households are a team effort as far as we are concerned.

The Convener: That is lovely to hear.

Alex Johnstone: That is interesting. I have heard today that the standard, everyday support mechanisms for school, health and whatever are not adapting to that change. Is that the case?

Allan Reddick: I totally agree about the change that has taken place in households. Among all our friends, it is 50:50 and everybody pitches in. Outwith that, though, childcare is very much the mum's role. Within households, everybody does whatever needs to be done—it does not matter who does it—but as soon as we take the children out into society, to school or whatever, it is expected that the mum will be there. That is the one thing that has not changed. The role of a woman is now identical to the role of a man in the workplace—it has taken years to get to that position—but the roles that have not changed yet are those of mother and father in society. Everything else has changed, which is right.

John Mason: As we head towards a conclusion, I am looking for guidance on specific things that we—or maybe the public sector as a whole—should be doing. Allan Reddick's suggestion is one of the most concrete ones that we have heard. I am thinking, for example, of the leaflets that are produced, which are a way of changing culture. We have heard some encouraging evidence about how things have changed a bit.

When we looked for dads groups, we discovered that there were not many around the country, yet the witnesses are pretty positive about them, as were the people whom we met. Should we just leave those groups to form in some places and not in others, or should there be more of a push for them? Should we be encouraging charities or local councils to set up such groups and support them as a focus and help?

The Convener: What do those fathers who do not go to fathers groups think?

Allan Kidd: We are members of the Edinburgh and Lothians Twins and Multiples Club, which makes provision for weekend activities, so mum and dad can go along. The dads who go to the club network with other fathers when they are there. If we had had a singleton baby, I would

possibly have gone along to a fathers group, a drop-in or something to talk about the issues that affect fathers in raising their children.

Allan Reddick: The other council-run groups do not discriminate in favour of mothers—it is their members who discriminate, and the groups become cliquey. The groups are open to dads—it is not that we are not allowed to go—but we do not feel comfortable when we get there. There needs to be a push from somewhere—from the council or elsewhere—to start more groups for dads, or to make it much clearer that dads are supposed to go and that they have a role in those groups.

As I said, it was just me and the mums in all the groups that I went to. I was allowed to go, but I was not made to feel welcome by the leaders or by the mums.

John Mason: I have forgotten the name of the group in South Lanarkshire. Is it a charity?

Allan Reddick: It is a charity called SPELL—Support for Play & Early Learning in Lanarkshire. It runs all the bookbug clubs and baby activities, and a lot of other activities in South Lanarkshire for early years education and development. SPELL supports us as the only dads group that it has on its books.

John Mason: When we visited Hamilton, we met a woman from SPELL who seemed very enthusiastic about the dads group and would like to roll it out further.

Allan Reddick: She is looking at doing more, because she has seen the success that we have had with the family man playgroup.

John Mason: Has the backing from SPELL been a help?

Allan Reddick: Definitely. SPELL started the group originally, and we have taken over from it. If SPELL had not started the group in the first place, it would not have happened.

John Mason: That is interesting.

The Convener: Has your group ever thought of going together as a small group to the mums-and-toddlers group? Perhaps three or four of you could infiltrate the group. [*Laughter.*]

You could go along to see whether you could break down the boundaries that exist. If there are more of you, perhaps other people will feel less awkward about talking to you.

Allan Reddick: The timing of the other groups is an issue, because they run on weekday afternoons. Every one of the dads in our group works during the week, so it is very difficult for us to go and break those barriers down. That is perhaps a societal thing: the mums stay at home

with the kids, so that is why those groups are for mums. I do not know.

Marco Biagi: Leaving aside what is expected of you from hospitals, schools, the groups, councils and employers, do you think that, as dads who are actively involved, you are in a minority or a majority among fathers? Would there be a majority if there were enough services to accommodate you?

Allan Reddick: I do not think that we are in the minority by any means. Nowadays, every dad wants to take an active role with their kids and do all this stuff, but there is no provision to allow them to do so. If there were more groups and activities geared towards dads, we would become the majority. I do not think for a second that we are the only or the very few dads in the country who want to take such an active role with their kids.

Peter McGhee: I think that there is a silent majority. There has been a change in mindset, and men are taking on more roles in the house and supporting their children. It is about getting the information out there. If I had not seen the leaflet and the poster in the community centre that day, I would not have known that the group was running.

John Mason asked what could be done from the Government's point of view. I will mention the white elephant in the room—such groups do not come out of fresh air; they need resources.

As Allan Reddick explained, we are the only group that pays our own rent to let the hall. That is a big aspect. We take money and we do fund-raisers, but we need that support.

The Convener: I said quietly to Allan Reddick that I would have a look at that and come back to you.

Peter McGhee: Thank you.

The Convener: That is no problem.

Christian Allard: I like the convener's suggestion about trying to break down barriers, but perhaps we are not ready yet. Perhaps we need to have more groups like yours.

We have spoken about the consequences of barriers between genders in everyday life, but what about the cause? Does it come from the education of our own children? For example, when we buy the first toy for our children, do we buy a doll for a girl and something different for a boy? What do you do in your group?

Peter McGhee: I am not sure about anybody else, but the first thing that my daughter goes to when she comes along to the group is the ride-on tractor, and I know that, for a couple of the boys, the first thing that they go to is the doll. That may be because they do not have those things at home

as a result of gender stereotypes, or perhaps it is just what they want to play with.

Christian Allard: Do you think that there should be action on that?

Peter McGhee: I know that there are pressure groups that have been looking at gender-specific branding of toys—for example, there are now no pink and blue sections in Hamleys in London. Things are changing in small drips, but we need to keep the fight going.

The Convener: I should put on record that I do not buy my granddaughter dolls or cookery sets. I buy her educational toys, which she absolutely loves, and she never plays with the dolls that she has.

As no other parent wants to comment, I thank everybody for coming along. The information that you have given us has been interesting, and your children are very lucky and fortunate to have such loving parents. We appreciate that you have taken the time to come along today.

Our next meeting will take place on Thursday 13 March and will include further oral evidence on our inquiry into fathers and parenting. Thank you again for coming.

Meeting closed at 11:12.

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 978-1-78392-884-2

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78392-901-6