



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 28 November 2013

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

31st Meeting 2013, 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

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Thornton

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 28 November 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:30*]

Work Programme

The Convener (Margaret McCulloch): Welcome to the Equal Opportunities Committee's 31st meeting in 2013. I ask everyone to switch off their electronic devices or put them into flight mode.

Around the table are staff from our clerking and research teams, the official report and broadcasting services. We are also supported in the committee room by staff from the security office. I invite members to introduce themselves.

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

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

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

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

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

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I am an MSP for Highlands and Islands.

The Convener: Thank you.

Item 1 is a decision on the committee's work programme. We are asked to agree: first, to write to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Government to follow up our inquiries into the discrimination that Gypsy Traveller people face; secondly, to write to the Scottish Government about our inquiries into women and work and having and keeping a home; thirdly, to seek an update on progress on the work of the advisory group on tackling sectarianism; fourthly, to conduct initial work on issues to do with female genital mutilation, with a view to informing a potential inquiry; fifthly, to seek oral evidence from the Equality and Human Rights Commission on its work on public authorities' compliance with specific duties under the Equality Act 2010; and sixthly, to look into issues that are faced by single fathers and fathers who share custody. Do members agree to the work programme?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Did anyone want to comment on the programme?

John Finnie: I am grateful that we have agreed to follow up inquiries. A lot of energy goes into doing an inquiry, not least from the clerks and supporting staff, and it is important that the recipients of our reports respond to them. I particularly hope that there will be positive engagement from COSLA on Gypsy Travellers.

Petition

Marriage (PE1413)

10:33

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of PE1413, on preserving marriage, which was submitted by Amy King. As the petitioner's concerns were addressed during scrutiny of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, members are asked whether they want to close the petition or take another course of action. I invite comments.

Alex Johnstone: Members of the committee are aware that I have certain, perhaps significant, sympathy with the terms of the petition. I hope that the petitioner feels that I and other members of the committee did what we could to ensure that such views were expressed during stage 1. I think that it would be appropriate for us to decide to close the petition, so that I and other members will be free to take forward the views that are expressed in it, as is possible or necessary, during the remaining stages of the bill.

The Convener: If there are no more comments, are members happy to close the petition?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Women and Work

10:34

The Convener: Our third and final agenda item is a discussion on the Scottish Government's response to our women and work inquiry. Members are asked to note the response and decide whether to take further action. I invite comments on the response.

John Finnie: I am grateful that we have a response, but I was a bit underwhelmed by the response to what we said about flexible working. The Government said:

"we will consider the potential for imposing a flexible working requirement on organisations receiving SG funding."

I had hoped for something considerably stronger than that. When the Government disburses public moneys, it is in a position to make reasonable requests, and in this day and age it is not unreasonable to request that organisations offer the full range of employment opportunities. I hope that the Government will reflect on that. Perhaps the issue will be picked up in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill—it should be. We need to broaden the range of opportunities that are afforded to people, where public money is concerned.

The Convener: Would you be happy for us to write to the Government to raise that issue?

John Finnie: That would be good. Thank you.

Siobhan McMahon: I was extremely disappointed with the Government's response to our report. We had taken a lot of evidence over many months in an attempt to produce a worthy report, and to receive such a response, which basically reiterates what the minister told us and does not give more transparent headlines—other than to say that the Government will do something—was disappointing.

I would like more information about what the Government is doing in relation to the outcomes that we asked for, specifically on occupational segregation and the modern apprenticeship scheme and on flexible childcare, particularly for children who have additional needs. The Government said that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill will set out certain things that it can do, but the bill does not mention disabled children. The Government should have given our report a higher priority and provided a fuller response.

The Convener: We can write to the Government about the issues that you have raised, if members agree.

John Mason: I do not particularly disagree with what members have said, but I think that there are some good points in the Government's response. On page 2, for example, it says:

"as noted by Angela Constance when she gave evidence to the Committee, occupational segregation is a challenge for Scottish society as a whole".

That is very true. There are things that Government and local authorities can do—there are things that we should all be doing—but there are big underlying issues and challenges out there. It is about education and changing people's attitudes in the longer term.

Christian Allard: I agree with Siobhan McMahon that the response is a bit lacking in detail. For example, things have been happening in Skills Development Scotland but there is not much detail on that in the response. We could ask for updates and a bit more detail about good work that is being done.

Marco Biagi: After we have written, I think that we will invite the minister to discuss the issues with us again, which would be valuable. It is important that we do not leave the report sitting on a shelf. I hope that by the time when we hear from the minister there will be tangible signs of progress in all the areas that we raised. I am content with what we have agreed.

The Convener: Okay. Does everyone agree that we should write to the Government about the points that John Finnie, Siobhan McMahon and Christian Allard raised and that, depending on the response, we will invite the minister back to the committee?

Members indicated agreement.

Meeting closed at 10:38.

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