The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 18 June 2015

Session 4

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
12th Meeting 2015, Session 4

CONVENER

*Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
*Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
*Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con)
*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

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

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Ruth McGill

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 18 June 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Margaret McCulloch): Welcome to the 12th meeting in 2015 of the Equal Opportunities Committee. The first item on the agenda is a decision on whether the committee's consideration of a draft report on our inquiry into age and social isolation should be taken in private at this meeting and future meetings. Do members agree to that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Because of problems with agenda item 2, we will have to move the agenda around and go into private session now. We will shortly go into public session for agenda item 2.

10:00

Meeting continued in private.

10:21

Meeting continued in public.

Tackling Sectarianism

The Convener: Again, I welcome everyone to the meeting and ask everyone to set any electronic devices to flight mode or to switch them off, please.

We will start with our usual introductions. I am the committee's convener. I invite members to introduce themselves in turn.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Good morning, everyone. I am the MSP for Glasgow Kelvin and the deputy convener.

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

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Good morning. I am an MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Madainn mhath. Good morning. I am a Highlands and Islands MSP.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): Good morning. I am an MSP for West Scotland.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am the MSP for Glasgow Shettleston, which includes Celtic Park and the headquarters of the Orange Lodge.

The Convener: The second agenda item is an evidence session in which we will look at the final report of the advisory group on tackling sectarianism in Scotland. Around the table, we have our clerking and research team, official reporters and staff from broadcasting services, and we are supported by security officers. I welcome the observers in the public gallery.

Would the witnesses like to make a brief opening statement? We will start with Dr Morrow.

Dr Duncan Morrow (Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland): Thank you very much, convener. I was the chair of the advisory group, and I really welcome the opportunity to speak to the committee. We spoke to the committee around a year and a half ago, and there has been a journey since then.

As members know, we produced our report to the Government just short of a month ago. I suppose that it was fairly consistent with what we advised in the interim report, but it settled down to having a number of themes. I will introduce those themes and will then give way to my colleagues. I could speak about the report for a long time, but I will try not to.

The core theme is that we think that there is potentially a good news story. Sectarianism has certainly left a big mark in different parts of Scottish life, but, broadly speaking, there is a consensus among most of the witnesses whom we met that it should play no further role in the public life of Scotland. We did not find anybody with any inconsistency on that. I suppose that, as ever, the difficulty is in how we move from a situation in which it has left a legacy to its visible disappearance.

We came to talk about not just sectarianism but its consequences. It became clear, as we tried to come to a definition, that something with a religious articulation in the way that people talk about it has shaped the way in which whole communities live. It is called sectarianism, but it has different aspects, some of which are political and some of which are social. In dealing with the matter, we must try to keep a core, with some focus connected to that, and be real about how it has manifested itself in a number of situations in which people may or may not have had any clear religious convictions. In the middle of that, there is a paradox to do with the way that religious convictions have decayed.

We recognise that, geographically, sectarianism is a very variable phenomenon. We feel that it had two fundamental roots. One was the religious history of Europe as it affected Scotland and the other was the way in which immigration—particularly from Ireland—and the consequences of industrialisation hit. Those mixes have had different consequences in different places, some of which are to do with the way in which a state operates and some of which are to do with real life and communities. That is another complexity, and it means that there is great local variation.

I beg the convener's indulgence to make two final points. For the reasons that I have just outlined, we believe that the community approach—which has been at the forefront of our approach in trying to engage communities and interests—is probably the best way to deal with the long-term issues, because they manifest themselves as much in multiple small things as in single big things and they are very different in different places. Therefore, the Government's approach has been to try to engage with the issue rather than to deny it at the local level and to encourage local people, local institutions and institutions that have a direct relationship to the issue to take responsibility for it.

Although we think that legislation around equalities and so on is vital and that political leadership on the issue is critical—one of the big questions is probably how, if we go down a non-legislative route, we will keep political attention on the issue, because for us it is a critical moment when we hand this back over—we believe that it is important to engage communities and that the development of a practice that is not about denial but is about recognition and action is the key bridge.

We believe that this has been the largest conversation on equalities ever conducted in Scotland, because we have had so many conversations and meetings over the three years. We think that, in addition to things such as legislation and policy, such an approach might be a useful tool for dealing with other equalities issues.

We also think that the issue can disappear. However, it will require to be figured out, because it is not a question of just saying that it exists or that it does not exist; the issue is how it stops existing. It is, therefore, a practical question and a lot of practical knowledge needs to be applied to it.

Dr Michael Rosie (Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland): I am from the University of Edinburgh. I will briefly add to Duncan Morrow's comments.

This was a huge conversation and the group was privileged to meet a lot of people along the way. I emphasise the good will and the friendly and productive spirit that characterised the conversations with all parties in the Parliament and with just about everybody to whom we spoke. They were keen for Scotland to engage with the issue.

The only other thing that I would add to Duncan Morrow's comments is that one of the strands that the group contributed to was research on what this thing is, what the different understandings of it are and how it impacts on different people in different ways. In the past three years, we have come quite a long way towards answering some of the questions. Of course, an academic would say that there are still some questions to answer, but we now have a much clearer picture of sectarianism than we did four or five years ago.

The Convener: Excellent. I look forward to hearing about that.

10:30

Margaret Lynch (Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland): I am a member of the group because of my involvement in the Conforti Institute, which is a faith-based community organisation in Coatbridge. In my day job, I am the chief executive of Citizens Advice Scotland.

I agree with my colleagues. For me, the work of the past three years has been an amazing experience, as we have been able to hear from people from all walks of life, from all parts of Scotland, from all social classes and from different

interest groups. I took great heart from the fact that all of them, without exception, were committed to ensuring that sectarianism belongs to Scotland's past and not its future. There was a general recognition that, although, in the past, sectarianism might well have been a structural issue that affected people's life chances in terms of their employment and opportunities, to some degree those days are behind us. However, sectarianism still exists within the culture of some parts of Scotland and in some areas of Scottish life, particularly football. That remains an on-going concern.

We are optimistic about the future, because there is general public recognition that we do not want sectarianism any more. I think that there will be a positive pressure on politicians and institutions in Scotland to ensure that they mainstream equalities work encompassing anti-sectarianism in the way that they run organisations and serve the communities that they exist to support.

The Convener: Thank you for those introductory remarks. John Finnie will start the questions.

John Finnie: Good morning again, panel. Our briefing paper states that your group was established in 2012

"to provide Scottish Ministers with impartial advice on developing work to tackle sectarianism in Scotland."

In your very fine report—thank you for it—paragraph 1 of the executive summary states:

"The specific form of sectarianism we have considered is that arising from the Catholic-Protestant tensions that are part of the historic legacy of Scotland."

I will ask a question later about definitions. However, Dr Morrow said that legislation on equalities is vital. I wonder what message the report sends to the wider Scottish community, given that we have neighbours who suffer anti-Islamic behaviour, anti-Semitism is on the rise, a Sikh temple was attacked and eastern European neighbours are being vilified. If there is a focus on sectarianism, does that not inadvertently fuel the view that we have a special type of discrimination? If it does, is that helpful?

Dr Morrow: Let us be honest about this: there are risks on all sides. Our experience is that lots of people have a huge fear of sectarianism and say that it is a dangerous issue—certainly, the attitudes surveys show that. However, when we look at it, we can see a practical way through it and that progress is being made on the practical front.

Paradoxically, part of our task—whether we have succeeded is another issue—is to normalise sectarianism. In other words, we have to bring it out of the too-hard-to-deal-with or phantom-in-the-cupboard box and put it on the table, not in order to magnify its role but to bring it into an evidence-based framework. You will see from the report that we have emphasised that shift. First, can we get sectarianism into a place where it can be talked about in such a way that it is amenable to action rather than just fear? Secondly, can we ensure that that action is ultimately based on evidence? That will mean that when we do not agree, or accusations are made or denial comes to the table, we have a mechanism by which to resolve some of the issues and move them forward in a normal equalities way.

On how addressing sectarianism connects to other issues, we think that it adds value to them, not because sectarianism is primary or the only issue in town but because addressing it demonstrates that Scotland can make real progress on such an historic issue and has made historical progress on the questions that it poses. We think that bringing to the table the issues of evidence, relationship building and acknowledgement rather than denial potentially does the same for the other issues to which Mr Finnie referred.

The risk if we do not do as I have described is that sectarianism is dealt with in the criminal justice system simply as emerging criminal justice problems, which has several consequences. One consequence is that the issue is dealt with as one that arises just with individuals rather than as a wider social question that can be dealt with only in society. Another consequence is that treating the issue as a criminal justice problem is very expensive, tying down—and it does tie down—a lot of police and criminal justice time. A third consequence of treating the issue as a criminal justice problem is that it tends to suggest that the rest of society does not have a role to play in changing the situation.

For all those reasons, we think that it is worth doing the work that we have outlined in order to shift the emphasis on the issue.

John Finnie: Under the heading "Churches", paragraph 8.7 of the executive summary states that we should

"Affirm cooperation where it exists, and encourage it where it has yet to emerge".

Is there a role for non-faith groups? A growing segment of the population would not assign any religion to themselves.

Dr Morrow: Certainly there is. Obviously, sectarianism is articulated in Protestant and Catholic terms. Such terms once had more meaning for a greater proportion of the population than they do now, although they still hold importance for large sections of the population.

We were clear in our work that sectarianism has shaped things that have nothing to do with religion, such as social media, youth culture, football supporting and issues to do not with the organisation of schools but with the pupils around them. Those things concern everybody in Scotland; they are to do with the way that community life is organised. The answer to your question is therefore yes.

John Finnie: Finally, we have the changed definition. Is there any difficulty for the adherence of non-Christian faiths when the definition of sectarianism specifically states that it is

"on the basis of their perceived Christian denominational background."

My concern is that sectarianism is something special. I abhor discrimination in any form, and I do not think there is a hierarchy. We either treat everyone with respect, or we do not. My fear is that, presentationally, the definition could suggest a hierarchy.

Dr Morrow: I understand the fear—and perhaps other witnesses could come in here, too. Our way to resolve the situation was to say that, as with all equality issues, there is a series of clear common values and specific ways in which they are acted out. Unless we can combine the two things, we end up trying to apply something in one world to another. We are trying to get a more nuanced approach.

We were asked specifically to deal with sectarianism, rather than all equalities, and that is what we did. Our view is that this issue has to be landed as one of the ordinary equalities, rather than being boxed off and not dealt with or viewed as taking up too much time. That is what success looks like. The risk exists with all such issues, but we believe that the best approach is to look for an evidence base, deal with sectarianism where it appears and try to find relevant appropriate action. That is the best way we could find to address the issue.

Margaret Lynch: We have never argued that sectarianism is the biggest or worst problem in the span of equalities issues. People are discriminated against on the basis of the colour of their skin, their class and the part of the country they come from. We have never argued that sectarianism is the biggest or most important issue, and we have never said that it is special. We have said that it has particular roots that are different from those behind anti-Semitism, for example.

John Finnie: Sectarianism is discrimination between religions. We cannot single out Scotland to be different and say that this is only between two of the religions in Scotland.

Margaret Lynch: We have not said that Scotland is different. Sectarianism happens in other places. I worked in the middle east for a while—there are sectarian issues in communities in all parts of the world. We were tasked to address the issue in Scotland, but the fact that our focus and remit was narrow and particular does not mean that other issues should not receive attention.

Our engagement on sectarianism has involved people from communities as far north as Brora and as far south as Annan. We have engaged communities across the whole of Scotland and brought them into a space where people can talk about the issues in a comfortable way that is based on evidence. That is a good model and method for tackling the other issues that have been referred to that are perhaps broader than the one we were tasked to address.

John Finnie: Many thanks.

The Convener: Time is tight and it is important that we cover the final report. Perhaps it would be useful to keep all questions related to that report. John Mason, do you want to come in with a supplementary question?

John Mason: This question follows on from what John Finnie was saying. Paragraph 1.11, on page 16 of your report, says:

"We were regularly advised that raising and discussing the issue of sectarianism would in itself encourage more sectarian behaviour ... undoubtedly some people... believe that silence is the most effective way to deal with social problems."

I do not think that that would be the case with black and white issues, with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues or with gender issues, which people want to talk about. Do you feel that there is something a wee bit different in the case of sectarianism?

Dr Rosie: I think there is. This indeed relates back to Mr Finnie's questions. There is a popular perception in Scotland that sectarianism is something that we should be very worried about—something worrisome, which people are afraid of. One of the things that we are trying to say is that, if we as a society open the box and look into the matter, we can find out what is in there that we need to be worried about and what we need to address.

Sectarianism is never seen in its pure form, of course. This relates back to your points, Mr Finnie. It bleeds into all kinds of other things. It is never simply about Catholic and Protestant; it is also about the history of communities in Scotland. It bleeds into other kinds of tensions, including those between faith and non-faith groups. That is something that I am becoming incredibly aware of. In relation to the part of Scotland where I originally

come from, Caithness, it bleeds into the Free Kirk and the Kirk having a bit of tension. There are Episcopalian and Presbyterian histories. There are lots of things.

I have always been intrigued by what it is that marks out sectarianism as different. If we ask people in Scotland about conflict over religion, almost the first place they go is to think about sectarianism in incredibly narrow terms—and they are worried about it. It is clear from the evidence that we have got over the past 25 years that people are concerned about it as a specific issue. I would hope that one thing that has come out of our group report has been that the issue is one that we can deal with, although we need to deal with it in the mainstream, along with all kinds of other equal opportunities issues that, as you say, we are much more comfortable discussing.

Annabel Goldie: One theme in your report—in both your initial report and the final report—is the need for leadership in tackling sectarianism. I wonder whether you have seen any positive change in the area of leadership that you could share with us.

Dr Morrow: First, if you do not go down the force road, you have to discuss incentives. We are trying to say that real change will depend on people stepping up to the plate. There is a legislative base, which needs to be supported, but for social change to happen incentives need to be there.

Secondly, the Scottish Government has funded a number of bodies, using a considerable amount of resource, over the past three years. We gave advice on where to put that resource. Those bodies will shortly be reporting on what they have learned. There are some really good examples, at church level, at community level, in youth clubs and within football associations. There are examples of people doing various things within Glasgow City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council. With a bit of a spotlight, people do step up to the plate.

Our concern and the next gap for us is about the intermediate levels, and I suppose that this will take some time. Can we advance the discussion of how to integrate this work with human rights and equalities through the bodies that are responsible? Can we get football clubs to move on from the current position in which they believe that, if they say that there is an issue, they will have to bear full responsibility for anything that happens in this context—which we agree is not fully their responsibility—to a position in which it is agreed that the issue interacts with who the clubs are and it needs to be taken seriously?

Thirdly, on schools, we felt that the really key issue is not to get bogged down with saying that these or those schools are good schools or bad schools, or that they are sectarian or non-sectarian schools. All schools should be encouraged to ask what contributions may be made to the debate.

To answer your question, there is a lot of good practice, which will be highlighted by the voluntary action fund—and you may get a chance to discuss that. On another level, our biggest concern is about how, after a report that is based on conversation is handed over, the work is incentivised and carries on. In the space between not wanting more legislation to burden people and being unsure about whether things will happen without leadership, we are concerned about how we keep monitoring the work and how we keep up sufficient pressure so that people feel that the issue is something they wish to respond to.

Annabel Goldie: That is encouraging—thank you.

10:45

Christian Allard: Good morning, I am happy to see you again. I remember the meeting on 10 November in St Paul's and St George's church, at which I learned a lot. It was interesting to see all the groups that are involved and to hear their feedback. As you said, tackling sectarianism costs a lot of money. I think we are talking about £2 million or £3 million a year, but it is well worth it. I read all the reports, and they were enlightening.

One particular aspect concerns the fact that, as you said, the rest of society has a role to play, as everyone is involved in what is happening. You talked in particular about the people who come to set up homes in this country and have to learn what sectarianism is, and noted that they find it strange.

The same thing applies in relation to football. People who support other teams have to teach their children what sectarianism is about, because they will encounter sectarianism at one point or another.

Did you really meet a brick wall when you spoke to football clubs? Do you think that there is a lack of leadership in Scottish football when it comes to addressing sectarianism?

Dr Rosie: The short answer is that we did not meet a brick wall. We heard that there is a desire to change certain deeply problematic aspects of football. Certainly, our research shows that, when you talk about sectarianism to Scottish people, football very quickly comes up. Often, it is the first thing that is mentioned.

More leadership has to come from the football authorities and leading clubs. We were routinely told about problems about instigating particular

things in football. We were systematically told by leading parts of Scottish football that strict liability—that is the common term—was unworkable. The challenge that we gave them—which they have had for a number of years and is in our final report—was to come up with a way forward, if they believe that strict liability is not the way forward. The only alternative to football making a clear and important leadership role in this area is for legislation or for bodies such as the police or the courts to get involved, which I think would be counter-productive in the long term. Football has a problem with sectarianism. It is not the be-all and end-all of the issue, which is much broader. We can get rid of this problem, but football has to take a leading role and help Scottish society towards that goal.

Margaret Lynch: I would say that we heard different voices coming from the football world. We heard people who I genuinely believe have a deep-seated commitment to challenging sectarianism wherever they find it, including within football. However, I also have to say that I heard a very senior person in the football world talking about sectarianism as being "a key business driver". We should not be shocked to hear that, because, frankly, the dogs in the street know that sectarianism is a key business driver for some clubs in some parts of the country. Therein lies the challenge. Some football clubs in Scotland have a massive following. We would not suggest that everyone who follows those clubs is sectarian, but we have to acknowledge that there is sectarianism present among those followers.

We cannot say that football speaks with one voice, because it does not.

However, the people who make money out of football in some parts of the country may well harbour a concern that, were they to tackle sectarianism up front overtly and energetically, that might damage business interests. That is perhaps a concern that may inhibit stronger action on their part. I am using words such as "perhaps" and "may" advisedly.

I have an issue because the work that is being done in football tends to be publicly funded. Vast profits are made from football. A barometer of how serious clubs are in combating sectarianism around football would be that they are not just prepared to spend public money, but they are prepared to make their own financial investment because, by the admission of some in the business, they are making a lot of money out of it.

Christian Allard: Before Dr Morrow comes in, I have something else for him to consider. We have just heard that some football clubs make money. However, some do not, and it costs them to combat sectarianism. Did you speak to those football clubs? What did they say?

Dr Morrow: We have spoken to a number of football clubs, football authorities and a lot of people who are involved in football at different levels. It is important to emphasise that the issue is not just at club level, but at junior level.

The police have told us that one of the most vexed and difficult issues is the permissive environment in which certain behaviours are allowed that would not be allowed in other situations. That is a useful term. A permissive environment is created, particularly around violence. That was the concern in relation to very aggressive behaviour.

One of the more worrying things is that that picks up and is fuelled by—I suppose that it works in two directions—what happens in junior football, people's social media time and so on. Indeed, sectarianism spirals out of control when it is with football.

Our dilemma is that, as Michael Rosie said, on the one hand, the research tells us that just about no one in Scotland talks about sectarianism without mentioning football. They two roll off the tongue together. That is part of the difficulty. One the other hand, which we recognise and do not want to take away from, football is not what sectarianism is. Football is not the problem. However, without the football authorities' involvement in taking whatever responsibility is theirs and even in working with us to work out where the issue starts and ends, the danger is that we are back in the debate about whether we should all be quiet about it and just let it go, or it becomes the big thing that is highlighted every week in the papers.

The position on racism is clear in UEFA. The economic and political arguments have aligned to say that it is in everyone's interests in the longer run to move out of that ghetto and move towards football being an important part of cultural life that is open to everyone. The critical issue for us is how we take on something on which people have their allegiances, background and so on, and take away the risks of violence and the permission that they might be given for a hostility that goes past and often spreads beyond football. How do we work the football authorities to ensure that that element is kept out of the road?

Christian Allard: You talk about the UEFA rules. The rules are clear. Article 11(2)(c) of UEFA's disciplinary regulations talks about:

> "manifestations of a non-sporting nature",

which may be in a stadium, for example.

Article 14(1) talks about insults:

> "including on the grounds of skin colour, race, religion",

so religion is included there.

Article 14(2) says that those can be:

"punished with a minimum of a partial stadium closure."

You said that the leading parts of Scottish football did not want strict liability because they think that that would be too difficult or impossible to introduce. I suppose that they are talking about the cost. However, there is a great cost to society in controlling the problems. We spend £2 million to £3 million a year to address the problems. When you asked them what should be in the place of strict liability, what did they answer?

Dr Rosie: We are still waiting on the answer to that. You should feel free to ask them that yourselves.

The UEFA rules, of course, count for UEFA competitions. We have the irony that my club, Hearts, could be playing one week and the songs that fans may sing are not punished, and then midweek they could be playing in a EUFA competition, but the same songs would bring down those UEFA rules on it. Strict liability seems to work in some competitions, but it does not work in domestic competitions.

I would love to see that in Scottish football. I am the father of a two-year-old son, and there has been a lot of debate in my family about the point at which he will get to come with me to the football. I hope that he likes it, but I am concerned about the culture in football stadia and how to make it better. Sectarianism is one area in which Scottish football has failed to act for far too long.

11:00

Annabel Goldie: So, in short, the leadership is skating on thin ice.

Dr Rosie: You might say that; I could not possibly comment.

Sandra White: Good morning, Dr Rosie. I thank you for the work that you have done and for your report, which is very interesting. You say a lot in the report about equalities, which is the issue, as this is the Equal Opportunities Committee.

I want to ask you about marches and parades. I represent the Glasgow Kelvin constituency, which covers the city centre, where there are a number of parades at certain times. I note your comments about equality being a right, and the need to talk to the communities and so on. You are right that everyone has a right to express themselves if that does not spill over into some other form that affects other people.

The concerns that have been raised not just with me but with other MSPs relate to the number of parades. You mention in your report the need to consult people. Should that consultation via the local authority—Glasgow City Council, in my case—relate to a cap on the number of Orange order parades in the area?

Dr Rosie: I am by no means a human rights lawyer, but I suspect that a cap would breach all kinds of human rights legislation on freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.

A legislative approach to the issues around marches and parades is probably the wrong route to go down. The approach should be about dialogue with the different parties that are involved in a particular event, all of whom have rights. That includes the rights of those who are processing and the rights of those who live, work or have businesses in the area through which the procession will go. The issue is complicated, and it requires more talk.

I praise Glasgow City Council because, if someone wants to know whether a parade is on in Glasgow—whether it is an Orange parade or a Republican parade, or the boys' brigade or the girl scouts—they can look on the council's website and find the information quickly. They can find out the route and size of the parade and the time at which it starts. In other council areas—Edinburgh, for example—that is very difficult. You might—

Sandra White: Sorry to interrupt, but you hit on the point about people being able to go to the website. If someone goes to the website and looks at the information on parades, they will find that there have been six Orange order parades so far in Glasgow and that more are planned.

You mention in your recommendations the right of communities not to be unreasonably disrupted, and you spoke just now about legislation not working. We have just passed the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill and we are working with local authorities. Should the right of people not to be unreasonably disrupted be looked at, as your recommendation states?

Dr Rosie: The issue there—this is where the law comes into it—is what "unreasonable" means. A couple of weeks ago, the Orange order held an event on a Saturday in central Glasgow, and there was quite a lot of excitement on social media. The following day there were something like eight Orange order parades for the annual divine service, but they did not create such excitement.

The mix of events is complex with regard to how people perceive them. Often, the issues that are raised around Orange parades concern their frequency, their number et cetera. However, I find that other events that are very frequent—in other parts of Scotland, for example, pipe bands will parade through towns and villages of a Saturday evening—do not evince the same disquiet among people. I would—

Sandra White: Sorry to interrupt you again. We are looking at your report on sectarianism, which does not mention pipe bands.

Dr Rosie: No—absolutely.

Sandra White: Perhaps someone else would like to comment. I am looking for comments on the inequalities issue from everyone.

Margaret Lynch: I would like to come in on that, not least because I live in a community in which, for the next eight or nine weeks, large numbers of us will be woken up every Saturday at around 8 o'clock by the sound of music. While that might be very nice, some of us might prefer to sleep on in our beds.

To me, that is a difficult issue in one sense but quite an easy one in another. In Scotland, in the 21st century, with a bit of good will, an element of maturity and the brokerage of the local authorities, we should surely be able to get into a space where community representatives and the marching or parading organisations can sit round a table and say, "Okay, guys. What is a good outcome for everybody here?"

Last night, I happened to be having a cup of tea in my pal's house, which abuts an Orange hall in which there is a band practice every Saturday. He was moaning about the fact that, because of that, his days of having a "lie aff", as we call it in Lanarkshire, are behind him for a few months. I know that, if my daughter and her teenage pals were generating that amount of noise by playing music in my back garden, the police would visit and say, "Not at 8 o'clock in the morning, chaps, and maybe not that loud."

I think that such a conversation is possible regarding the bands; it is just that nobody has attempted to have it because there is not an easy route into it. For example, how does someone phone up their local Orange Lodge and say, "I live round the back of your hall. D'you think we could come and talk about the noise?" People as individuals will not do that. To me, it is part of the role of local community organisations, community councils and local authorities to help to support the process whereby a sensible and, frankly, low-key dialogue is had about what happens in a village or town on an on-going basis between, usually, May and the end of August.

We have had a number of meetings with the Orange order and I have to say that I have found it reasonable, approachable and sensible. I think that, more than anything else, it wants to be "respectable-ised". It wants respectability as an organisation and to be included in, if you like, the realm of respectable organisations in Scotland. It feels that it is not allowed to inhabit that space at present. I can see that it has a strong desire and motivation to engage in the kind of constructive conversations that I described.

I would like to see leadership at the local level, with the community council, local councillor or local authority creating and making available to people the mechanisms whereby those sensible conversations can take place. If we did that one thing, I think that a lot of the resentment that builds up between communities around parading would fade away.

The Convener: Dr Morrow, please be brief.

Dr Morrow: I will be very brief. We did not go for a cap partly because of rights issues but partly because the definition of a cap might vary between local communities. There is an issue around local brokerage in that respect.

A number of issues are involved, but frequency is an issue if it starts to be about fear or occupation of space. Behaviour is also an issue, as is responsibility and how far it extends. In other words, when you bring people on to the street, who are you responsible for? All those issues need to be brokered and dealt with in a way that takes us away from any permissive environment around either fear or violence, which are the two things that we are concerned about in sectarianism. They need to be taken out of it, and, as has been said, that always tends towards having legislation if we do not get co-operation.

However, in an ideal world—and not just in an ideal world—we see local authorities and local community councils having a critical and key role in engaging with issues rather than standing off on them, working through any local issues around frequency or behaviour and becoming clear about how they intend to approach those issues by bringing in the organisations that are responsible and the communities that feel affected.

The Convener: Thank you. We move on to questions from Jayne Baxter.

Jayne Baxter: In the final report, the group states that there is a gap in the research on sectarianism. Will you comment on that and on whether the Scottish Government has done any work in the past year to begin to fill the gap?

Dr Morrow: I have to say—sorry, may I speak, convener?

The Convener: You may. [*Laughter*.]

Dr Morrow: I am always responding without giving you your place—sorry.

The Convener: Thank you. You have my permission.

Dr Morrow: Something exciting has happened in trying to get the research away from the anecdotal. There are two elements—the first is

quantitative, which is about hoping that equality statistics will be produced so that they can be monitored and people can challenge them, and the second concerns attitudes and residual issues. Those things can be regularly monitored and placed in the public domain, which is important.

However, sectarianism is not just a problem of data; it is a problem of relationships. It is about how people feel and how communities operate on the back of that. We had a couple of reports on particular issues. How is parading perceived and how does it work? How does sectarianism operate in different communities? It is not a single thing, and it may be different in the west of Scotland compared with how it is in the Highlands.

We have identified a number of further pieces of work that we think could come out of our work. There are obvious issues such as how sectarianism connects with football, which is important. Another issue is gender, because sectarianism impacts on women and men in distinctive and different ways. Also, how does sectarianism operate on social media? It takes up quite a lot of the hate crime zone in social media because of the aggressiveness with which it is used, and there is a grey area concerning how we regulate this new and difficult but important area.

We think that a series of qualitative pieces of work would improve the situation, and we hope that we have set that in train over the past three years. Let us get on to the evidence base.

The Convener: I ask Dr Rosie to be very brief.

Dr Rosie: I will be very brief. Scotland is well served with quantitative evidence and is rich in relation to what we can say about people of particular religions and none, and that will continue because it is embedded in the practice of various surveys. However, there are gaps in the research. It is always dangerous to let an academic speak about gaps in research, because they will come asking for money. Gender is a key issue, as is the impact of social media and how people can enter into conflict from their own homes.

It is important for the Scottish Government to hand the issue over because leadership needs to come from the research community, including universities. There is lots of data but it is clear where we do not have qualitative studies. People such as me, Duncan Morrow and the broader research community should get public money not from the Scottish Government but from research councils and elsewhere to start filling in those gaps.

Jayne Baxter: Would any of those topics be a priority? We could discuss the issue all day, but is there a stand-out priority? Is it social media, football or gender?

Dr Rosie: For me, social media is a priority because I do not think that we as a society understand its impact, particularly on young people. The second issue would be gender.

The Convener: I have a question about education. In your first report, the group was clear that sectarianism would not be eradicated by closing schools—by that, you meant Catholic schools—and you continue to support that view. Your stress on the importance of education in tackling sectarianism is echoed in your final report.

I went to a religious school and I wonder why you think that merging non-denominational and Catholic schools would not remove those barriers and sectarianism. I very much felt as if we were different from everybody else. I did not understand what went on in the other schools and I think that those in non-denominational schools felt the same.

You also mention the twinning of schools, which is happening, but as I understand it—I might be completely wrong—there is still a divide and people do not cross the line. At the end of playtime, pupils go to their two separate schools, so they are separated again. Will you expand on that and say why you think that schools should not be merged?

11:15

Dr Morrow: I will say something about that, which my colleagues will probably add to.

We looked at that. Obviously, the issue of schools, attitudes and young pupils at the front line is really important. I do not want it to be misunderstood that we think that it is not.

We think that the behaviour of schools, their values and how they offer people opportunities are issues. There is twinning and there are the opportunities that might come out of co-locations, the opportunities that happen because of relationships at the local level, and the opportunities that now need to be mainstreamed.

We think that sectarianism needs to be part of the curriculum. It needs to be part of what Education Scotland talks about, and opportunities need to be offered. We saw very good models in Lanarkshire. Glasgow schools were able to use English, drama and religious education to pick up the issue in a very good way.

On the other hand, we think that the relationships are more important than saying that schools are bad or are responsible or not responsible, and that the debate on the opening and closing of schools tends to polarise into two issues: who is responsible, and who are the bad guys and the good guys. The key thing is to focus on children and what is happening for young

people rather than on schools. I would not want us to be misunderstood and for it to be thought that, by saying that we do not think that school closures are the first issue, we do not think that what happens in schools is critical; it is. Things need to happen from the top with an all-school approach from Education Scotland.

To be honest, one of the key tests for us will be how that will happen. I will give an anecdotal story from one of the most long-standing and impressive projects. The sense over sectarianism programme was established in Glasgow City Council with a liaison group, and a process was developed around the novel "Divided City", which was used in primary 6 classrooms. Once the programme was put into place, we heard that the demand quite considerably outstripped the availability of staff to deal with it. Headteachers looked for mechanisms through which to find a constructive way to address this and are now looking for ways to transfer the approach into the secondary school system.

We believe that the primary way in which we can engage schools is not to target a school as a good school or a bad school. Encouraging schools to develop proper partnership relationships and ensuring that the them-and-us culture is part of what they build down and that there are the tools and the capacity to deal with this at the curricular level are the primary focus of how we want to see progress.

The Convener: I want to be clear. I am not saying that there are good schools and bad schools—that is the wrong thing to put across—but I still do not understand why schools cannot be merged.

I will give a good example. My son lives in southern Ireland. The family chose to send their children to an Educate Together school. If anyone wants any kind of religious education, that will be done outwith the school. All the children come together, share the same values and are taught in the same situation. Obviously, it is hoped that that approach will break down any kind of sectarianism that may be formed.

I still cannot see why the merging of schools would not create that result. Things would be done at a very early age. People work with children very early when they go into primary school. There is excellent teaching in both denominational and non-denominational schools. Why can that good practice not be shared together and come under the one roof to break down sectarianism?

Margaret Lynch: My daughter attends a Catholic school. I come from the Catholic community and am a strong believer in Catholic education, not particularly for religious reasons, ironically, but because it is a value-based education that looks at the development of the whole child. It does not look at only academic success; it looks at the development of the whole human being, which is fundamental.

In fact, there is no evidence whatsoever that Catholic education creates, exacerbates or results in sectarianism. Until such evidence can be landed, this debate is an unreasonable one to have, to be honest. Until there is clear evidence that Catholic schools produce or exacerbate sectarianism, the conversation that we have should be about how we ensure that our children grow up in communities that value difference so that people respect other people who are different. That is not just solely in the realm of Catholic and non-Catholic kids; the fact that many Asian kids attend schools in Glasgow with white kids does not necessarily diminish their experience of racism. The issue is what is taught in the school and what values underpin the education that is provided; and part of that should be about partnership and the school reaching out to its community and being engaged with all parts of it.

I would put up a very strong defence for Catholic education in any event, but I do so particularly because the evidence shows that Catholic schools get better educational outcomes for children, especially those from deprived backgrounds. Aside from that, if there was evidence that showed that Catholic education resulted in more sectarianism, that would have to be addressed, but at the moment such evidence does not exist—in fact, the evidence is quite to the contrary.

The other issue that needs to be confronted is that we do not hear a similar discussion about schools that are selective on the basis of how much money the children's parents have or what class they belong to. There are parents in Edinburgh, for example, who choose to pay for their children's education and send them to be educated with other children whose parents are equally financially well endowed. However, I have not heard it argued that the existence of Heriot's or Fettes is why the class struggle is an on-going feature of Scottish society. It strikes me that there is one rule for people who want to have a separate education for their children based on class and money, and another rule for those who want their children to have a Catholic education.

The Convener: I want to make it clear again that I was not implying that sectarianism was bred within Catholic schools. What I am trying to say is that merging Catholic and non-denominational schools breaks down barriers. As you said, there is an excellent ethos in Catholic schools, which could be transferred to non-denominational schools and they could learn from it.

Dr Morrow can have a very brief comment, as we are running out of time.

Dr Morrow: We as a group come from different backgrounds. I am a governor of an integrated school in Northern Ireland, and all my children went to integrated schools. All I can say is that, with integrated schools, the question is how we protect diversity, and with separated schools, the question is how we promote interdependence. We do not get away from the question either way. The group's strong view was that, if sectarianism is a question of barriers and breaking them down, then that is a legitimate question, but the breaking down of barriers is not just a question of closing schools or targeting one side or the other; it is about being much more clearly focused on what happens to children in the middle of that.

To be clear, models of integration that seem to have solved the interdependence problem might be useful. I am not personally in a place that says, "We should not have them." Nor am I in a place that says, "Just because you have separate schools, you can't do anything about these issues of sectarianism." A process of diversity in schooling brings to the table things that challenge all of us, which is useful. All those things are true but, for us, in terms of sectarianism, the question was, where would you put your money if you were going to talk about taking down this social issue of division? We would put it on the child rather than on the schools.

The Convener: That more or less backs up what I was thinking as well. John Mason has a question. We are very tight for time.

John Mason: I realise that. To try to help us work out the way forward, you have made some comments about the future in your report. At the end of section 5, in your recommendations for the Scottish Parliament, you talk about the need to take things forward

"in a consistent long-term way ... this can only be achieved if there is a shared political vision".

As you know, politicians are not very good at long-term thinking. You know how the Parliament works—we have the Parliament, the Government, and committees such as this one. Do you have any specific suggestions? Do you think that this committee should spend a bit of time on the subject of sectarianism?

Dr Morrow: There are two points. First, the question of monitoring and how the issue is regularly raised is important. It should not be done in a bureaucratically heavy way, but it is nevertheless important. Part of that monitoring needs to come from the normal equalities monitoring. If you move to that approach, is it an issue and will it be done through the various agencies that are responsible for that monitoring? Somehow or other—at least for the next period, until it is decided that it is no longer a question—the question of whether we are making progress on this should be raised regularly.

The interparty work on this was unbelievably important. Like all equalities issues, if this issue broke down on a party basis, we could hardly have these conversations because they tend to create political alignments around particular groups. Frankly, that is an unhealthy place to go, so I thank all the political parties in Scotland because the debate has not broken down like that, which is positive for the future. There are practical questions that people may have different solutions to—that is appropriate—but the general commitment to consensus has been there.

The second point, which has not raised its head, is that we believe that local government has a critical role in this. The negotiation and insistence on local government's role in this is something that has not barked. We have had conversations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and our view was that, for example, having the capacity in councils very clearly identified, including the responsibility for reporting, allowed for local flexibility but also allowed for somebody in public life to take responsibility. It may be that approaching it through the national performance framework or something of that nature or through some of the negotiations with local government would be a good way to go.

The monitoring of sectarianism and the leadership by political parties on tackling it needs to continue, so we need to be very clear that we need a practical mechanism to ensure that that is not just a pipe dream—that it really happens. We also need to have a practical conversation now with local government about how that is reflected in their capacities.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Dr Rosie—you will have to give a very brief response.

Dr Rosie: I will just briefly echo what Duncan Morrow said. Over the past five years, Scottish politics has been changing remarkably and it is a testament to this Parliament that nobody has played politics with the issue. It is important that that approach continues. It is also important that we move on from any idea that sectarianism is a special, unique problem in Scotland, because it bleeds into all kinds of other equalities issues. The committee, I think, is an ideal place to take forward some of that work. It is up to you to determine whether it is for you, but I encourage you to think about sectarianism not as a special case but as something that encapsulates equalities issues.

The Convener: Thank you all very much. I thank the witnesses for your very valuable

contributions; we really appreciate you coming along. We now conclude today's meeting.

Meeting closed at 11:28.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78568-893-5

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78568-907-9

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland