

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 14 September 2004

Session 2

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE 18th Meeting 2004, Session 2

CONVENER

*Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)

*Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

*Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

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Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP)

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP)

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Margaret Hickish (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland)

Trevor Meadows (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland)

Malcolm Stewart (Bus User Complaints Tribunal)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

ASSISTANT CLERK

Euan Donald

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament
Local Government and Transport
Committee

Tuesday 14 September 2004

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:03*]

Item in Private

The Convener (Bristow Muldoon): Good afternoon. I welcome members of the public and members of the committee to our 18th meeting of 2004 and our first meeting in these new surroundings at Holyrood. I am sure that everyone will agree that this committee room is an excellent place in which to conduct our committee work; I hope that it will be conducive to excellent work in the committee in the years to come.

Iain Smith, Tommy Sheridan and David Mundell are unable to attend today and have sent their apologies.

Under our first agenda item, it is proposed that agenda item 3—the committee's forward work programme, which the committee will obviously wish to discuss before approving—should be discussed in private. Do members agree that we should discuss the item in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Transport (Scotland) Act 2001
Inquiry

14:04

The Convener: We now move to the committee's inquiry into issues arising from the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. It gives me great pleasure to welcome to the committee, as our first witnesses in our new surroundings, two representatives of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland. We welcome Margaret Hickish, who is the convener of the committee, and Trevor Meadows, who is a member of the committee. I invite Margaret and Trevor to make some introductory remarks, after which we will move to questions.

Margaret Hickish (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland): Thank you, Bristow. I particularly want to tell the committee about the position of MACS on concessionary fares, about which we thought long and hard before publishing. Our position on concessionary fares is perhaps controversial. We do not talk about the need to have free travel for disabled people; we talk about concessionary fares being built of a number of constituent parts. We talk about the fact that we need access to transport, not just free travel. For example, if a person cannot get on a bus, having a free bus pass is not particularly useful.

It is also terribly important to disabled people to have information that enables them to know not only which transport systems are accessible but when those services run. We are also concerned about customer service support. Staff training is a key building block in a truly inclusive transport system. Last but obviously not least, concessionary fares and affordability are important too.

A particularly important aim for MACS is to have a performance specification of how transport works for disabled people. At present, one can have free bus travel—or free taxi travel in some areas, because some councils have made people choose. For some disabled people, the outcome has been that they can travel during the day but have no social life. That is not necessarily appropriate; in fact, I would say that it is not appropriate at all. If we measured outcomes and had a performance spec on the improvements for disabled people, money spent on concessions—rather than talking about concessionary fares, we talk about concessions—would have a much greater impact on disabled people's lives.

We would like a concentration on individuals and on outcomes for individuals. We should return every year and consider what improvements there have been. Much of the research that we have

seen has been based on people who are already travelling, but what about people who never leave home? What about people who have developed a disability and do not leave home because the last time they travelled on a bus it was not accessible? Information telling people that buses are accessible may well be out there—now far more than ever before—but lots of disabled people do not know what is meant by “accessible”. Lots of disabled people do not know what is meant by a “low-floor” bus. Does it mean that a wheelchair user can get on, or just that someone who can cope with a very small step can get on?

We need information and education, and we need customer service. People who deliver services have to understand the needs of disabled people. That is why MACS believes that measuring outcomes and considering performance standards would improve things greatly for disabled people.

Trevor Meadows (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland): To get right back to basics, we have to consider what our objectives are. What is concessionary travel trying to achieve? Currently, there are no well-defined objectives in terms of individuals. As Margaret Hickish said, the objective is to provide a concessionary travel scheme, but that objective is not couched in terms of what we want to achieve for people.

If we consider issues such as social inclusion for people with disabilities, what are we talking about? What kind of facilities and activities do people need to get to in order to live an ordinary life? How many times a week do they need to go out? What kind of travel patterns will they make when doing those things? If we had that information, we could better understand the relevance of the existing transport system and would be able to ascertain the effect of giving people a pass and whether that would solve the problem or whether we would need to do much more detailed planning locally to establish what mix of services might deliver the kind of mobility that people need.

The issue is not just about access; it is about outcomes and the need to consider mobility and people’s journey purposes. A couple of reports on existing concessionary schemes have been produced during the past few years and it is clear that, for those who are mobile enough to use such schemes, the system is biased towards shopping—about 60 to 65 per cent. That is not a typical pattern; shopping should not account for much more than 20 per cent of journey purposes. That suggests that existing systems probably afford limited choices and do not give people a range of opportunities and the freedom to do what people who are able to use a lot of different modes of transport do.

One of the current constraints on local authorities is the absence of a requirement to deliver objectives in terms of outcomes and therefore to deliver a range of services—taxi card schemes, for example, which Margaret Hickish mentioned. Such services are an option for local authorities, but there is no legal requirement to deliver them. Some areas, such as Edinburgh, offer door-to-door services, which are important when we realise that 50 per cent of people with a disability cannot walk more than 60yd—that puts the main bus routes into context. People who can walk only 60yd will only use bus stops that are 30yd away, because they want to feel that they can get home safely if they miss the bus. Basic things like that really matter to disabled people.

On concessionary travel, we would like a lot more activity on the part of local authorities to connect with local communities and understand their needs and we would like local authorities to have a duty to deliver a mix of services, rather than just one service or, as Margaret Hickish said, a choice of one or the other—either a taxi card or a bus pass.

We must get back to considering individuals. Over the years, a lot of progress has been measured in outputs rather than outcomes. People have measured the number of low-floor buses, for example, rather than the impact that those buses make on the community and whether they offer the right mode of transport. We need to improve the intelligence system behind the planning, to ensure that what we set out to do is relevant.

The Convener: Thank you both for those opening remarks. I open up the meeting to questions.

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): The witnesses have hit the nail on the head. For many members of the public—and probably many people who are attending this meeting—the concessionary scheme has been about price rather than the issues that the witnesses raised and that have been raised in the committee before. The point is well worth making.

I will consider the legislative aspect of accessibility, although there are other aspects, such as culture and the need to enable people and local authorities. Does the current legislation succeed in providing accessible bus facilities? If it does not, where is it falling down and what changes would help the situation?

Margaret Hickish: Most people, in particular disabled people, are aware of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and of the delivery of accessible vehicles in compliance with the act. People have exceedingly low expectations of accessibility, because everything that is published talks about end dates and few people are aware that there have already been changes.

One of the most important issues around enabling disabled people to get out and about, to be active and to take part in society is about enabling them to feel confident to travel. Legislation would be required to ensure that transport meets the needs of a range of disabled people and that a range of facilities is available. It is sometimes thought that, as long as one route going past someone's door is accessible, that is fine. Would that be fine for other people? Legislation should return to equality. That is what disabled people really want. They want equality of choice, just the same as everyone else.

14:15

Mr McFee: As far as the DDA is concerned, you have said that the targets are quite far out. Would you advocate earlier implementation—or just straightforward implementation—of the act? Do you have examples of where the legislation has not, so far, gone to timetable?

Margaret Hickish: We do not have particular examples of where it has not gone to timetable. There are issues around the designs that will comply with the requirements of the DDA, which will be difficult to implement in some regions of Scotland. For example, the lifts on the sides of coaches require 3m pavements. There are a lot of rural areas where that is simply not possible—where there is not 3m of pavement.

It worries me that, in changing the legislation, we will return to concentrating on providing access without actually getting people on to the transport system. That would be problematic, as transport providers would see that as a huge burden with no bonus. They would not see an increase in the number of people with mobility impairments travelling, because the majority of those people might not be aware of the improved access. There has been lobbying from providers of transport, who have said, for example, that using the lifts on the sides of buses will take a long time. Other items need to be considered, including bus boarders.

When I arrived at Waverley station today, I had to wait until someone came along with a ramp before I could get off the train. In Germany, because of the standard of the trains, it is possible to press a button to get a ramp to come out from under the train. That means that people are not required to wait and can travel as anyone else does. They press a button to open the door and, if they require a ramp, they press another button. The issue is partly about the standards that apply and partly about access. It is about the contents of the DDA not necessarily fitting in with some of the items that we would require in Scotland.

Mr McFee: So things have to be incorporated rather than added on at the end. We tend to think

of provision for people with disabilities at the end of the process, rather than at the start of it.

Margaret Hickish: Yes, absolutely.

Trevor Meadows: We are nowhere near the stage of people in the various professions concerned gaining a real understanding of the variance in the range of disabilities and mobility problems. If the existing legislation is implemented, it will not mean that everybody has mobility. Under current specifications, low-floor buses are not accessible to quite a number of people. Having run tests, I have found that about 50 per cent of people who use some mobility aid, such as a wheelchair or a scooter, cannot get on those buses, for a variety of reasons. There will always be someone who cannot cope with what there is. More analysis is required. We need to know the market and what the solutions would be.

Some of the measures under the DDA would be enormously expensive to apply to intercity coaches or rail systems. We would need more analysis to examine the business case for that. Will the money come from the fares box or will there need to be a subsidy? If we, as a society, believe that people should have access to places, we must accept that some things will not be paid for commercially. If we know the market well enough, it looks as though there will be a large number of short-distance trips and a small number of long-distance trips. If we spend a lot of money on long-distance modes, a subsidy might be needed because, without one, the operator will be damaged. The issue is sensitive.

We return time and again to the question of the level of access. What is accessible, not just in the broad sense that Margaret Hickish described, but even in the physical sense? We know of a case in which two operators said that they had accessible vehicles but a chap who had to interchange on the route became stuck halfway and could not get on to the second bus, because it was not accessible to him. Many designs are geared towards wheelchair access, but there is a tendency for increasing numbers of people to use scooters, because they feel that they are less stigmatised. I have experience of people who travel in their bed. I also remember a chap who could not sit down because he had a frozen spine. How do we develop a system that will cater for all individuals? Although we see references to modes of transport being fully accessible, I have never come across that in reality.

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): You mentioned some examples of authorities entering into more or less informal arrangements with bus operators to provide certain services. Do you think that those arrangements have improved services? You have identified problems with them, but has there been

an improvement where informal arrangements have existed?

Trevor Meadows: The main experience relates to the introduction of door-to-door systems. There has been much research—beginning in the 1970s, when Amelia Harris published her report on the disabled and elderly in Britain—that has shown that one of the biggest needs is for door-to-door services, because there is a problem with walking distances. That is certainly true of the older elderly. I forget what the politically correct term is now—it used to be “the elderly elderly”—but I am referring to those over 75. Many of those people do not see themselves as disabled and are often under-represented. They are the people to whom Margaret Hickish referred—those who are shut away. Basically, social workers have to get them to come to terms with isolation, because there are no options.

When door-to-door services are introduced, there is huge demand for them. We see a range of journey purposes that is more balanced, rather than being biased towards shopping. People do a large amount of social visiting and reconnect with friends. Those friends may live quite close by, but people with mobility problems can no longer walk to their homes and cannot afford taxi fares, unless some kind of subsidy is involved. If we are really to achieve mobility, we may need to have a mix of concessionary travel services. We have monitored the increase in use of low-floor buses, but it has not been huge. Where more flexible paratransit services are introduced, the demand is colossal.

Michael McMahon: You have provided good examples of what is required. However, the existing arrangements seem to have been made on an informal basis, rather than on a statutory basis. Do you think that a statutory basis is required to expand the good practice that exists and to make it deliver services in the way that you want? The authorities have powers under legislation, but they have not used them yet. Do they need to go further in formalising the arrangements that can be made under quality contracts and quality partnerships?

Margaret Hickish: We return to the issue of setting performance standards and measuring outcomes. Where outcomes are achieved, systems will show a benefit and will come under the umbrella of performance standards, as they will have improved people's lives.

Trevor Meadows: I will highlight one important point. Within the structure of local authorities, spending on transport is often seen in isolation from those areas where benefits accrue. Where local authorities are divided into sectors, transport will be located in the engineering sector rather than in the social sector. No one is yet examining the benefits of mobility. If people have mobility

problems, are shut away and need health and social care, there is no zero spend on those services. What are the trade-offs between spending on mobility and spending on institutionalising old people before it is necessary and providing extra domiciliary care, for example?

Some work on those issues has been done in other countries. I am aware of an example from Oslo, in Norway, where about 15 per cent of the people who were using a quite diverse system were kept out of residential accommodation. The cost of those people entering residential accommodation was calculated to be greater than the subsidy for the whole service, so we are talking about quite big trade-offs. However, current local government structures do not allow us to make those connections.

Attempts have been made to kick-start the development of a cost-benefit analysis that takes into account more than just costs, but such attempts have never been successfully carried through. I think that such things are just put into a box marked “Too difficult to open”. Rather than just saying that that kind of thing would not be very useful, we need to recognise how useful it would be in helping local authorities to evaluate the balance between subsidised mobility and health care and social care.

Michael McMahon: Would that encourage transport companies to engage in providing what is required? That suggestion might be okay for services that are delivered by authorities, but would there be a problem if the private contractors were not prepared to invest in the types of equipment that would be required to undertake those contracts? How would that problem be resolved?

Trevor Meadows: Because of the correlation between disability, age and poverty, I do not think that the majority of the services that are needed will turn a profit. That is the problem. Often, operators do not like increases in trade from people who are by and large slower, because those people slow routes down. Operators certainly do not have a track record in delivering paratransit systems. Those have been run by more specialist organisations either in-house within local authorities or within the voluntary sector.

In the past, spurious comparisons have been made when people have said that it is cheaper to put someone on a low-floor bus than on another mode of transport. However, one cannot always substitute one thing for the other, like margarine for butter. We are talking about something that is doing a different job. The economic evaluation is poorly developed. Certainly, commercial companies could be interested if the services were subsidised, but they need to know their trade.

However, the reason why MACS exists is that commercial operators in the bus industry do not know their trade. They do not know the whole market. That is why people are dropping through the gaps.

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Will you clarify further the difference between hopes and present realities? Who now provides door-to-door services and what do they provide? To what extent are such services in existence?

Margaret Hickish: Door-to-door services vary from area to area. Some people have access only to taxi cards, but dial-a-ride buses also exist and, in Edinburgh, we have Handicabs. A number of other community transport initiatives also help by providing door-to-door assistance, although, with the exception of taxis, they all have a major problem in that they must be booked some time ahead. Sometimes that means that people need to book 48 hours in advance, when they feel well enough to do so. However, if their condition is not in a steady state but in a state of flux, they may not be well enough to use the means of transport when it turns up two days later. A big problem with the demand-responsive transport that is being organised just now is that, because it is provided on an ad hoc basis in order to try to keep costs to a minimum, those who have been picked up first can end up being on the bus for quite a long time. There are issues with that kind of system. Trevor Meadows has a lot of experience of that.

14:30

Trevor Meadows: Good practice exists, but the problem is that it is never disseminated. There is no recent guide—the one that was produced some years ago has not been updated. The problem is that we are trying to develop a system that is like DHL for people so that it can deliver anything anywhere at any time. However, we need the appropriate best-value solution to deliver that and to co-ordinate things. As Margaret Hickish hinted, high-quality skills are needed for that kind of dispatching. We need a system that would be aware of where low-floor buses could go, so that they could be used as the first option, given that they have the lowest cost.

Other parts of Britain have proceeded some way down the line. In the west midlands, there are big systems that deliver 2 million or more trips a year. In London, funding has been provided for a long time in all the boroughs. I am not sure about the level of provision in Edinburgh, but perhaps other people know more than I do. Such systems get so far, but because there is no record of comparative outcomes—as Margaret Hickish mentioned in her initial comments—nobody can see clearly what the different services achieve.

Some services accept concessionary passes and some do not. A pilot project in Fife came about because an analysis of concessionary fares found that the people whom such fares were supposed to help were exactly the ones who were missing out most. The experiment was to try more of those schemes, on which people can use the bus pass. Moreover, the transport will not be withdrawn: as a result of the variance that Margaret Hickish spoke about, people will use the big bus on the days that they can, but on other days they can use a smaller bus that will come to their door. However, the system is hit and miss and we return to the point that, currently, these matters are a lottery rather than a duty.

Mr Welsh: The telematics transport system in Finland helps those in rural areas, but it is also available on other services like the ones that you mentioned. You were able to give a percentage of people whose needs were met abroad. Do you have any such figure for Scotland?

Trevor Meadows: No, I am sorry.

Mr McFee: The same problem that you mentioned exists with the dial-a-bus system in the Strathclyde area, in that one has to hope that the service can be taken advantage of in one's area and book ahead.

I propose a different scenario. Is the ultimate solution that we should try to make every bus that plies every route in every place fully accessible to virtually everybody, or should the money that would be required for that solution follow individuals as opposed to being invested in an all-singing, all-dancing new form of transport? If the money followed the individual, perhaps in the form of a taxi operation run by a local authority, might the individual pay the equivalent fare with the subsidy coming from one of the other social services budgets? Which line should we follow? The danger of continuing to go down the line of making every adaptation possible is that it would still not produce the right outcome. Are you arguing for wholesale adaptation or that the money should follow individuals who have more severe mobility problems?

Margaret Hickish: You will hate this answer, but we need to do both.

Mr McFee: I knew that you were going to say that.

Margaret Hickish: How would you feel if a bus turned up and the driver said that, because you had blue eyes, you could not get on? That is the reality for many disabled people. In the long term, every transport system should be as accessible as can be achieved, but there will always be people who will not be able to use transport systems that are run for the majority. We have to accept that there are two parallel paths—it is not possible to

choose one solution or the other because we would be choosing one group of people over another.

One of the reasons why I became involved with MACS was that I was very frustrated. I was travelling between Glasgow and Edinburgh at the time and the access-to-work scheme was paying me to drive to work because, as a disabled person, my journey would have been so complex otherwise. I would much rather have read a novel on the train than driven to work. I did not choose to sit in the traffic congestion in Edinburgh; it was something that I had to do to get to work.

If that access-to-work money could have been better invested in contributing to a more accessible transport system, it might have taken me and who knows how many other disabled people off the road and away from having to claim access-to-work money. Trevor Meadows referred to joined-up government and working on spending and savings and on the social advantages that would accrue from enabling people to go to work without it being a chore just to get there.

To travel from Glasgow to Edinburgh by public transport would have taken me more than two and a half hours and would have involved five taxi journeys every day. I would have had to get a taxi to take me from one side of the rail track back to where my car was parked three quarters of a mile away on the other side. Obviously, that is frustrating. Equally, you can see that, if Government took a more joined-up approach, we could encourage more disabled people to be socially active and, perhaps, get more disabled people into work. I am just one example of the situation.

The Convener: What proportion of door-to-door services are available only from nine to five or on a similarly restricted basis that means that they are not available to someone who wants to go out in the evening, for example?

I recognise your quite correct desire to have fully accessible vehicles on all bus routes. At the moment, only some buses are fully accessible. What difference would it make to people's ability to make travel decisions if there were more consistency in the guaranteed deployment of fully accessible buses on particular routes?

Margaret Hickish: In all of MACS's meetings with disabilities organisations, I am not aware that any organisation has said that anyone has access to demand-responsive transport apart from taxis after 5 o'clock in the evening. At that point, everyone either pays for a taxi or uses their taxi card, if they have one. That brings us back to the question of the number of times that a disabled person is allowed to go out in a week. Some taxi card schemes limit the user to only two or three

journeys a week. In that situation, people start to wonder how many classes they are allowed to take and how many friends they are allowed to have.

With regard to fully accessible buses, there must be some prioritisation in the service. We have to gather statistics on what provision would make the most difference to people. That is important. Equally, reliability is a key issue for disabled people. Going on public transport is like a military operation—you almost feel like giving it a codename. Recently, I tried to travel up to an area just outside Nairn. When I eventually got hold of the number of a local accessible taxi, I was told that the taxi had been in an accident the week before and that there was no accessible transport for 80 miles that would get me to the area that I was hoping to go to. The occasion was a meeting of a non-departmental public body, but I simply could not go. That is exceedingly frustrating and happened purely because there was only one accessible vehicle within 80 miles of the place.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): What interaction have you had with the Scottish Executive and what responses have you received from it on some of the issues that you have raised today, particularly concessionary fares?

Margaret Hickish: The Executive has been particularly positive about the concessionary fare issue. It has the concordat to work to and it does so.

We hope that you will find sensible the idea of talking about concessions rather than concessionary fares because, obviously, concessionary fares are of no use to someone who cannot use a bus. There is a problem with simply telling the 840,000 disabled people in Scotland that they have concessionary travel on buses. Perhaps we could ask you to agree, in partnership, a new concordat that would enable disabled people to achieve more mobility—once again, we return to the issue of the performance standard. Note that I do not use the word "access". That is because we want to empower people to travel and give them the same freedom of choice that others have. That is one of the main aims of MACS.

We want to help the Executive to achieve as many people as possible being able to use public transport. We want the modal shift just as much as you do, particularly as many people will not be able to move away from their personal transport and will be able to move somewhat quicker if there is less congestion.

Paul Martin: I have a question not about concessionary fares but about how you communicate with those who are disabled and need to use the services. What is the most

effective way for that to be done? The issue faces all transport users, particularly given that services can be complicated, as you have set out. What is the most effective way to communicate what is available and what is not available?

Margaret Hickish: It is important that people have choice. Different people access information in different ways, whether they have a disability or not. Sometimes they will find out on television, sometimes on radio and sometimes on local buses. Notices in the post office will sometimes help some people just as much as others, as will a leaflet through the door. The other thing that we have to understand is that social services will help many of these people. A one-on-one service through which someone can ask questions cannot be beaten. As Trevor Meadows mentioned, if someone is told that a bus is accessible, what level of access does that mean? It is important that there is someone to ask what it means.

Trevor Meadows: That is important for people who have not travelled for some time. I have come across people who live in tenements and have not been off the floor that they live on for four years. Even if you say, "Come with me and I'll give you a drive around town to see what it's like," they are too scared to go out again. There are a lot of mental problems to do with gaining access. I have met people who have not been out for anything up to 18 years. That is extreme, but not to go out for two, three or four years can be quite common.

A lot of persuasion and confidence building are needed. People do not know where to go any more, so they have to go through the barrier of finding out where to go, and they might need support with that. In some areas, such as London, mobility officers are employed who will do mobility training and go with someone to get them out and about. People do not have the muscle tone left, and it is exhausting and frightening to go out. They watch TV and sometimes pick up not just information but scary stories about the modern world that make them want to stay at home.

At one end is quite an intensive process. At the other end, there are people who are ready to come out—younger disabled people with higher expectations. Many elderly disabled people are very stoical and just say, "Huh. This is just what happens to you when you get old." They do not demand an awful lot, although they probably form the majority. Getting information by word of mouth or through someone whom they already know is very important indeed.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Trevor Meadows mentioned that we need to disseminate good practice. What other information do you think we need before you can move on to the performance standards in your discussions with the Scottish Executive? Are you saying that we

need to commission another piece of research, or do you feel that you have at your fingertips the various action points that we need to get cracking? Can we phase it? Could we move towards a performance standard? I think that you are saying that the matter ought to be in legislation or regulations, or whatever.

14:45

Trevor Meadows: Quite a lot of information is available from the past 20 years that can be put together to give an insight into the market. It comes from operators and is practical information from working with people. Someone telling somebody that they are disabled does not help. We need to know what the barriers are to moving—what is stopping people moving. As Margaret Hickish says, that might be different from one day to another, as their condition changes all the time. Getting away from medical certification and getting more understanding into the professions about mobility issues and what stops people moving are key to understanding much of what needs to happen.

If we are considering equity and social inclusion, it is better not to ask about transport needs. If we ask people who do not travel whether they have any unmet transport needs, they will say, "No. I don't go out any more." They do not know what they do not know, so the better way to get information is to consider people who are mobile and find out what they do and do not do. Rather than ask them about transport, it is better to ask them whether they do their own shopping, visit their friends, go to the bingo or go to work. That allows us to see clearly the gap between those who have mobility and those who do not. Such information is usually much more reliable because it allows us to see the kind of journeys that people make.

For those with more severe disabilities and for frailer, more elderly people, we have to think about a mode of transport that mechanises walking, because they cannot walk, and that need changes throughout the year. Among the elderly, the fear of falling is colossal, because of the death rate due to broken femurs—I think that about 33 per cent of elderly people who break their femur die after a year. Local authorities could do more on that with better-planned street maintenance, for example. Elderly people will not go out if the gap between slabs is, perhaps, 1cm—to an old person, the gap is very frightening. Local authorities also do not have intelligent targeting for salting pavements, because they have not done demographic analysis to spot where old people live. A lot of practical stuff could be done if there was better demographic analysis behind the engineering, but engineering seems to be divorced from demographic analysis.

It is possible to see what needs to be done. The Executive is framing a research project to examine such issues in relation to concessionary travel. Unlike some of the work that has been done, such as the Buchanan report, the project will take a random sample of people who would be eligible for a pass and find out whether they bothered to get one—quite often they do not, unless they have access to a relevant service, such as a taxi card service or a door-to-door service—and what they are doing with it, what they are able to do, what kind of journeys they are able to undertake for what purposes and how often they use it, which is another critical factor.

It is possible to make comparisons between the two groups—the mobile population and immobile people—that enable us to build up a picture of what is needed and what transport systems will deliver that. That did not happen in the United States of America in a big way. The USA was ahead of us with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, a lot of which was aggressively driven by the Vietnam veterans, as you probably know. They campaigned for existing services to be made accessible, but it was not until they had achieved that that they realised that they still did not have mobility because services did not give them the opportunity to make the journeys that they needed to make.

Dr Jackson: That is interesting. Accessibility and cost were mentioned earlier. Although cost might be an issue because the only accessible means of transport might be an accessible taxi, which can be costly, I take it that it is not the big issue in the long term, because, if we had the kind of processes that you have mentioned—for instance, you mentioned making the trains more accessible—that would alter things radically. You are moving away from the concessionary fares idea altogether and are taking a much bigger approach. I have been impressed today by what you have said about how helpful your approach could be to elderly people. I thank you for what you have said. It has been very helpful.

The Convener: We have concentrated largely on bus services and door-to-door services. It has been right to do that, because we are examining the 2001 act. However, we have also touched on railway services, so I give you an opportunity to expand on your assessment of the current level of accessibility of the trains and of the railway infrastructure—stations and access to them—and on what you hope the new franchisee, along with the Executive, will endeavour to do over the coming years.

Margaret Hickish: Train services offer a number of challenges to the new franchisee. At present, someone with a mobility impairment who requires assistance has to phone up at least 24

hours in advance. Despite it being booked, the level of assistance is variable and depends on where a person is in the country. It is difficult to find out information about a station that they are going to or stations at which they need to transfer, so booking a journey that involves a change of train can be quite problematic.

One of the members of MACS who is no longer on the MACS committee has a drawer full of vouchers that have been given to her to reduce the cost of her future travel, which she received because her assistance did not turn up. She has a visual impairment and is entitled to travel for free, so giving her a reduction in the cost of her travel is somewhat pointless. You can see that to be given a £10 voucher when it is worth nothing to you is a huge frustration. It is almost an insult.

Trains can be exceedingly frustrating vehicles to travel on, even if you are a disabled person who wants to travel first class, because some time ago, ScotRail decided that there would be no accessible wheelchair spaces in first class. There are quite a number of challenges to be taken up. ScotRail will allow a disabled person to book a first-class seat—I have had experience of that—and will take their money and their companion's money. However, then it refunds the money for the disabled person who could not get into the space and expects their companion to travel in first class while the disabled person travels somewhere else.

There are many challenges and things to be sorted out about travel for disabled people. There are issues such as assistance not turning up, the accessibility and location of seats and how train staff behave towards people with disabilities. Sometimes the facilities on trains are not used. For example, there is a scrolling board that tells passengers which station they are at. It is frequently switched off and the system that allows the conductor to make an announcement to tell someone who has a visual impairment where they are is frequently not in a good state of repair and people would not necessarily hear the announcement.

Many other people find it difficult to travel. We have had experience of people with hearing impairments complaining about their treatment on trains, people with visual impairments not being assisted to get off trains and people with mobility impairments not getting space.

Information tends to be key in someone deciding whether to travel. It does not matter what the vehicle is, information is the key because someone cannot decide to travel if they do not know that they are going to be able to get all the way through their journey. That is one reason why so many people might well be staying at home.

Trevor Meadows: For many people, going on a train is a rare event. If we go back to patterns of movement, people might be travelling locally every day, but they are not used to going on a longer journey by rail. The journey will be unfamiliar, so people need to know that, when they get to a station, it will be easy and simple to use. Usually it is not; it is quite confusing with video screens that people cannot read and staff who are not always as helpful as they might be. Frequency of use is important, particularly for frail, elderly people who might be making their once-a-year trip to visit their daughter who lives somewhere else. Doing things for the first time is a frightening experience for any of us and that is quite an important factor.

Mr Welsh: What is the way forward? Clearly you believe that the existing legislation is not working, so is legislation the answer or are there practical steps that could be taken in co-operation with the providers of transport? What do you see as being the main practical way ahead?

Margaret Hickish: It has to be working in co-operation with transport providers. Legislation has its place, but it might not produce the intended results. Often it produces resentment because people feel that they are being forced to do something that they would not normally have done. If people can be persuaded that doing something is a good thing, their attitude will be much more positive, and where that has happened, we find that the customer service and the information are much better. Even if a vehicle is not as accessible, the simple fact of being treated courteously makes it possible for people to enjoy the journey. That is particularly important. All of you want to enjoy the journey, and all the disabled people whom we come across want to enjoy the journey too.

The Convener: That brings us to the end of our questions. I thank Margaret Hickish and Trevor Meadows very much. This has been a very useful session that has shown us what a huge agenda lies ahead if we are to achieve the levels of accessibility that we would all wish to achieve.

We will move straight on to our second group of witnesses. Again, we will be considering issues associated with the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. We welcome Malcolm Stewart, who is the convener of the Bus User Complaints Tribunal, and Gavin Booth and David Hunter, who are both members of the tribunal. I invite the gentlemen to make some introductory remarks.

Malcolm Stewart (Bus User Complaints Tribunal): Thank you, convener. Members already have the briefing paper that we submitted, and I have nothing too much to add to it. We do not have a great volume of complaints about fares and concessionary fares generally, because they fall outwith our specific remit. However, we get

some complaints—although very few. We are quite happy to talk about that, but our evidence is very sketchy and not in any great volume at all. Our publicity shows that our brief actually precludes us from considering complaints arising from such issues. Certain commercial matters to do with the operators—such as timetable changes and fares policies—fall outside our remit as well. Our brief is therefore somewhat restricted. Our publicity explains those restrictions to people who want to lodge complaints with us; we are perhaps stopping them at the pass, so to speak, before they get into the office. If the committee appreciates those points, we are quite happy to go ahead on that basis.

The Convener: Thank you.

Mr Welsh: My question continues on from my previous question. I note from your submission that 30 per cent of the complaints that you receive fall outwith the scope of the tribunal. Do you feel that the current legislation succeeds in ensuring the provision of a level of service that meets the requirements of bus users, or should the legislation be extended?

Malcolm Stewart: We do not really have a lot of information that would allow us to give a good, positive answer to that question. We have some evidence that people feel a degree of frustration. That frustration comes back to us, and we are worried that people will view us as somewhat toothless. When BUCT cannot address a complaint about the withdrawal of a bus service, for example, what is the point of complaining to us? On behalf of complainants, we do at times raise such questions with the operators, but that is where our remit stops. In fact, that goes beyond our remit, but we do it as a courtesy.

If our remit was broadened to require us to look into the withdrawal of a late-night bus service—to take a simple example—we would need to start to fulfil the role that used to be filled by the traffic commissioner before deregulation. To be frank, that would raise an awful lot of questions about the size of the administration and the powers and funding that we might have. For example, if we decided that the late-night bus service should be reinstated, who would pay for it? We would not have the power—as the commissioner did not have—to insist that the service be supported, so where would the funds come from? We would be in a murky area between public demand, local authority funding and the commercial interests of operators. If we were to act as judges in such circumstances we would require powers that go way beyond even those of a traffic commissioner.

15:00

The Convener: I imagine that in the vast majority of cases the services that are withdrawn are the ones that do not make a profit.

Malcolm Stewart: I would say so.

The Convener: Would the legislation on quality bus contracts and partnerships address that issue if it were fully to be put into effect by local authorities and bus companies? Quality contracts would specify the services that were contracted between the partners—railway franchises operate in a similar way, and it is considerably more difficult for a railway service to be withdrawn if it is defined in the franchise agreement.

Malcolm Stewart: That is an interesting question, especially in light of the fact that no quality contracts exist anywhere in the United Kingdom. If I may return to our good old late-night journey, the simple answer is that if the local authority determines that the service meets a social need, the legislation already exists to enable the local authority to fund the provision of that service. That happens in many cases. I do not think that the quality contract argument is relevant to that particular, isolated set of circumstances. I am not entirely au fait with the conditions that are attached to quality contracts or partnerships in that context, but I think that those provisions are intended to address much wider issues. Given that there are currently no quality contracts, I suspect that there is hesitancy about setting up the first such contract. As I understand the legislation on the conditions that are attached to quality contracts, there would have to be an almost complete breakdown of the provision of public transport—in an area or a corridor, for example—before a quality contract would be established. Our involvement with complaints about bus services has supplied no evidence that such a situation has occurred anywhere.

Mr Welsh: Do I detect a certain amount of frustration on the part of the Bus User Complaints Tribunal in relation to its powers and public expectations? If so, what practical steps could be taken to increase your powers? Would legislation be required and if so, what do you suggest?

Malcolm Stewart: The frustration is not total.

Mr Welsh: Good.

Malcolm Stewart: Our powers are limited by statute, so any change would require legislation.

One of our frustrations is that we cannot address complaints about an express service. In some cases, express services provide a local service. For example, if one travelled from Kingussie to Aviemore, it would probably be on an express service, but it would also be a local service and one could not complain about a local service that was provided by an express service. We have raised that issue with the Executive, which has taken it on board. There is a transport bill in the offing that might incorporate that provision, so it is being addressed, although one has to go back to legislation to do that.

There is another frustration that might come back to us, although I stress that it is not a big issue at present. If a complaint is related to staff attitude and we find that the driver was less than helpful or courteous, we can find in favour of the complainant, advise them as such and then advise the operator that we have found against it because of the performance of the member of staff, but there it ends. The operator has denied the complaint in the first instance and one has to remember that we can address only those complaints that have not been addressed satisfactorily by the operator. The complainant will say, "Fine. So what? I have won my complaint." He can feel satisfied with that, but in this era, I am afraid that people will become a wee bitty frustrated about that response, rather than finding that they can get something out of their complaint.

You might then ask me what we can do to give the complainant something. I cannot give you an answer at this time because that raises a horde of questions about how to compensate people and how to put a value on that compensation, and we do not have a template for how to deal with that. However, there is a danger that that aspect of our work could become a problem. We need to get more experience under our belt before we can give you a more authoritative answer.

Paul Martin: What publicity have you produced to make users aware of your role? You have said that you can determine complaints about the frequency and routing of a service, for example. Does that not contradict the aims and objectives of your organisation, which state that you have

"a voice in securing better bus services"?

I do not have any details, but is the type of complaint that you cannot determine set out in the legislation or do you interpret the legislation to decide what you can and cannot determine?

Malcolm Stewart: If I miss some of your points, come back to me about them because I was not taking a note of them. As regards publicity, we have advertised and continue to advertise in *Metro*, which is distributed free on bus services throughout Scotland. In that way, we hope that we are hitting the people who use the bus services in the main. We produce leaflets and I can leave copies with you—I have some with me, as always. They set out who we are, what we are, how people can contact us, what complaints we will address and, sadly, what complaints we cannot address, which might lead to frustration.

We also have the agreement of the bus operators to put headliners—those longish bill posters—on the inside of vehicles. That is a more recent measure—we hope that they will start to appear in the next month or so. We have just started to distribute them to the bus operators that

are to display them. We paid for the production of the headliners, but we do not require to pay the operators to display them. The operators also make reference to our activities in their timetables. Some timetables may not have space for that little strapline, but the majority of timetables produced by operators refer to the fact that if someone has a complaint and is not satisfied with the reply they get, they can raise it with BUCT at such-and-such an address. Local authorities advise the public about BUCT on posters and in leaflets, which they distribute through whichever offices in the local authority network they consider appropriate. The operators have undertaken to put a little strapline below their reply to the complainant so that if someone complains to an operator and they are not satisfied with the reply they can raise the matter with BUCT. That is as much as we do as far as promotion goes.

On timetables and what we can do within the legislation, the legislation does not specifically say, "You can deal with this but you can't deal with that." It is recognised that we do not have powers to impose any condition on an operator in relation to a matter that is for the operator's commercial judgment. If an operator decides to raise its fares for commercial reasons, that is within its powers, and it is outwith our powers to consider such situations—frankly, at this juncture, it is outwith anyone's powers to do so. It used to be the case that the traffic commissioner was the sole body able to decide fares, but that power was taken away from the commissioner way back in the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981. We do not have any powers over commercial decisions because such powers do not exist.

Concessionary fares are determined by the local authority. If a local authority decides to have a particular type of fare, such as a fare for a journey to a particular destination that crosses a boundary, that is for the local authority to determine. We cannot say to it, "We've had complaints about this. What are you going to do about it?" It is a local authority decision.

Have I missed any points?

Paul Martin: Your response is sufficient in relation to the issues that I raised. However, there is a conflict between delivering a better bus service and the legislation, which you have described as meaning that you are unable to deal with certain issues. I appreciate the commercial considerations.

Malcolm Stewart: Those issues are covered in the legislation. The statutory instrument set out the matters that we would deal with and it was recognised at the outset that, essentially, commercial matters remain with the operator.

The Convener: I apologise to Bruce McFee for encroaching on the area that he wanted to ask

about. I am sure that he will still have a very useful question.

Mr McFee: I certainly hope so.

Sorry, gents, but the word "impotent" springs to mind. Let me get this straight: there are certain things you can investigate and there are certain things you cannot. Even when you investigate a complaint, you may be unable to enforce the resolution.

Malcolm Stewart: That is absolutely right.

Mr McFee: So the word "impotent" is probably—

Malcolm Stewart: Let us take a genuine case—one that we are able to investigate and where we find in favour of the complainant. Let us say that there has been a loss to a complainant because they had to use a taxi after the bus did not pick them up. Remember that the complainant has already raised the matter with the bus operator, which has said, "Sorry, you have no case. We're not going to give you any money." If we find in favour of the complainant, we tell the operator that. We can say to the operator that we consider that it should reimburse that person to the tune of, say, £5, because that is what their taxi fare was. We cannot decide on any other compensation payment on top of that, and we cannot force the operator to make the £5 payment. That is the way in which we are structured.

Mr McFee: I accept that—and that is a restriction in the legislation, and not one that is self-imposed.

Malcolm Stewart: Absolutely.

15:15

Mr McFee: I just wanted to clarify that point, because I think that Paul Martin raised it, although not quite as directly.

You cannot deal with 30 per cent of all the complaints that come to you, because they are not within your remit. I think that you said that some complaints were, in effect, turned away at the door when you informed people that you could not deal with their complaints. That will clearly cause frustration to build up among the travelling public, who would expect an organisation called the Bus User Complaints Tribunal—or "sometimes complaints tribunal", I suppose it would have to be called—to address their concerns. However, that is something that you cannot fix yourselves.

Of the 70 per cent of complaints that you deal with, 45 per cent—nearly half—come into the general category of "dissatisfaction with service". Could you go into a bit more detail on that?

Malcolm Stewart: The main complaints are to do with buses that are late or do not turn up—

that are early, for that matter. I am struggling to answer the question without going into commercial aspects, but those are the main complaints. If an advertised bus does not appear, or if buses run late—which, to be fair, can be outwith the operators' control—frustrations can arise.

Mr McFee: So the complaints relate largely to the timetables of buses, or to non-adherence to the timetables.

Malcolm Stewart: In particular, they relate to non-adherence to timetables.

Mr McFee: Do you know of any successful quality bus partnerships in Scotland? I found it difficult to think of any. I understand from my local authority days that quality partnerships involve a much lower standard of specification in what is agreed to between the local authority and the operators. Is that a fair assessment?

Malcolm Stewart: You will appreciate that that issue is not within our brief. However, because we are involved in the industry, we clearly have some knowledge of it. I do not believe there to be any formalised quality partnerships as envisaged in the 2001 act. That is not to say that partnerships of their own design do not exist between operators and local authorities. I can only assume that such partnerships suit both the operators and the local authority in what they want to achieve in the provision of public bus transport in their area. You would have to ask the operators or the local authorities about how formal or informal such partnerships are.

Mr McFee: I understand there to be a difference in standard between a quality bus contract and a quality bus partnership. The partnership has a far lower degree of specification and lower targets to be achieved.

Malcolm Stewart: I think that I would agree with that.

Mr McFee: I will put a straightforward question: is there not a case for the reregulation of the bus service?

Malcolm Stewart: That is a question for the lady and gentlemen of the committee to address, rather than us.

Mr McFee: Okay, I will ask the question in a different way. From your standpoint, and given the restrictions that are on you, do you think that we could improve on the service that is being provided here and now if there was a move to reregulate the bus service? In other words, if there was legislation to reregulate the bus service, would that or could that improve the present situation, in your individual view?

Malcolm Stewart: All right. This is purely my personal point of view, and I give it purely from my

own experience as a bus user. I do not have any complaints about the provision of my bus services in Fife.

Mr McFee: Lucky you.

Malcolm Stewart: That is my experience, so the question that I throw back to you is: in what way would my bus services be improved if there was a change to the legislation to reintroduce regulation? Perhaps that might improve services in some areas, but I have no experience on which to base a sensible answer.

Mr McFee: Perhaps I may throw back one or two answers. If you lived in a more rural area of Fife, you might actually have a bus service and if you lived in a city, you might not find the streets chock-full of buses from four or five different companies at certain times of the day. We could go on for ever, but I will stop because I know that Michael McMahon wants to comment on a similar issue.

Michael McMahon: I want to follow up on the issue. Bruce McFee perceives a certain degree of impotence—

Malcolm Stewart: I hope that you mean on the part of the tribunal.

Michael McMahon: I will always assume that that was what Bruce McFee meant.

Before we reach for the legislative Viagra, I want to ask a question. You have obviously built up a fair degree of information and experience from the complaints that come before you. Does your remit allow you to use that experience to tell local authorities and bus companies about the kinds of complaints that you get and to advise them on how to improve services?

Malcolm Stewart: The short answer is no. The tribunal is obliged to report back to the minister, who lays a report before the Parliament. There has been only one such report since we were created, but it is intended that a report will be produced at the end of each calendar year. We are directed to report on specified items—more or less the matters that I included in my submission to the committee—and we can make general remarks about perceived trends, but that is almost the limit of what we report to the minister.

We have received a number of approaches and we might receive a formal approach from local authority transport officers for feedback on the complaints that we receive about the services that they support. Currently we do not differentiate between commercial and supported services; if a passenger has a complaint, we will investigate it, regardless of the type of service—that is what we are charged to do. However, through the traffic commissioner's registration documents we can identify whether a service is supported and we can

involve the local authorities if they so wish. We like to think that that work might lead to improvements in services. We have not yet been approached by local authorities and we have not seen any correspondence that would allow us to report back, other than to the traffic commissioner, about the need for something to be done in a particular area. We have an obligation to report to the traffic commissioner, rather than to the local authorities in question, issues that we identify as needing attention.

Michael McMahon: There is scope for you to take things forward. Could your remit expand over time?

Malcolm Stewart: We would like to think so.

Michael McMahon: Is there anything in the legislation that would restrict your development into an advisory body?

Malcolm Stewart: No—that is my understanding.

Mr Welsh: When people phone you with complaints, they must be pretty irate. Your submission says that you have received 175 complaints, which—if my arithmetic serves me rightly—represents a little more than 12 per month, or three per week. If we are talking about relevant complaints, the figure is eight per month, or two per week. Is that the tip of the iceberg? What function do you perform?

Malcolm Stewart: You must remember that we are a young tribunal. There is no other such tribunal in the United Kingdom—there is an organisation south of the border, but it is not a statutory body. There is no culture of complaining to a bus users tribunal, as there would be with a rail users organisation. We are getting ourselves established, so it is a wee bit early to judge whether we are performing a useful function or not.

People who have complained to us and had a decision in their favour, or people who have been satisfied by the bus company before a formal tribunal decision has been required, will tell you that we have performed a worthwhile function. Before getting in touch with us, they will have been rejected by the bus company. They will then have got in touch with us and, in 40 per cent of cases, been satisfied by the bus company before we had to address their complaint. One therefore has to ask whether the bus companies are addressing their complaints properly, rather than whether we are performing our function. However, without us, those people would have been left frustrated, without their complaint having been addressed.

The Convener: Because of some of the answers that we have heard, some of Sylvia Jackson's questions might now be redundant.

Dr Jackson: I just want to clarify a point on the third page of the submission. You have listed the complaints that you receive and given percentages beside them. The punctuality of buses seems to be the main issue that you deal with, and the complaints that you cannot deal with are not really so relevant. Is that right?

Malcolm Stewart: Perhaps confusingly, the figures that I have given relate to all the complaints that we receive, whether or not they are relevant to us. The category "dissatisfied with service" could include frequencies. For example, people may have had their Sunday service reduced, their service removed or their service rerouted. The category is a catch-all and covers some things that we cannot address.

Dr Jackson: So I was correct in thinking that you can look into only a subset of that category.

Malcolm Stewart: That is correct.

Dr Jackson: What bodies, if any, exist to deal with the complaints that you are not dealing with? You obviously cannot deal with concessionary fares, but what kind of issues have you heard about? How could such schemes be improved?

People have also been considering the difficulties with through-ticketing. The minister set up a working group to look into complaints and talk to the people involved. Did complaints that came to you but with which you could not deal go instead to that working group, or had your organisation not been set up at that point?

Malcolm Stewart: I am not familiar with that group. We get complaints about through-ticketing—in fact, we are dealing with one just now. For example, the driver may not have known the right fare, or the passenger may have been travelling using two different operators and therefore could have had a different kind of ticket. We get a limited number of complaints like that and we try to follow them up as best we can. However, we do that as a courtesy rather than as part of our primary function. If someone has taken the trouble to write to us with a general complaint, we will pursue it by going back to the operators and encouraging them to talk directly to the complainant, rather than through us as a third party.

The problem with concessionary fares that most aggravates people is the difference between the concessions in different local authority areas. We now have concessions for people of the age of 60, or older. We are therefore talking about quite a mobile community. People now have more time and they want to get out and about and travel further afield. Under the Fife scheme, as a resident of Fife, I can travel to Glasgow and Edinburgh. However, not every local authority offers such a facility, which people want to enjoy,

so we get complaints that express frustration about not being able to cross boundaries. People can cross some boundaries, but not others—there is no uniform scheme. It is clear that what is looked for is a uniform scheme that crosses the boundaries, even if it has peak restrictions and is off-peak only. If there were a uniform scheme, that would go some way towards satisfying the complaints that we receive.

In some cases, the arbitrary use of service restrictions frustrates people. We had a couple of complaints when someone who wanted to go from Glasgow city centre to Glasgow airport could not use the Glasgow airport express service, but if they wanted to they could go via Paisley and use the local buses out that way, which I suspect would have taken two or three times as long. We have no control over that condition, but one would assume that it was placed by Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive or the council. We also receive that type of complaint, which is specific to a service.

Dr Jackson: Does any other body pick up any of those issues?

Malcolm Stewart: If someone has a complaint, they raise it with the bus operator and then they raise it with us. If they are still dissatisfied, they can go to their member of the Scottish Parliament, their member of Parliament or their local councillor. However, there is no body other than us that deals with such issues formally.

The Convener: That brings us to the end of questioning. I thank Malcolm Stewart, Gavin Booth and David Hunter.

15:32

Meeting continued in private until 15:59.

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