

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 22 March 2001

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 22 March 2001

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

Drug Misuse and Deprived Communities

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Good morning. The first item of business today is a debate on motion S1M-1766, in the name of Johann Lamont, on behalf of the Social Justice Committee, on the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's report into drug misuse and deprived communities.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sure that you expected this point of order, but I hope that you will accept that the circumstance is different on this occasion. Only one amendment to the motion was lodged, but you still refused to take it. Would you care to comment on your decision?

The Presiding Officer: As I have explained to you, Mr Sheridan, I do not like giving reasons for my decisions. If you come to see me later, I will happily tell you privately, but I do not want to get into the habit of giving reasons in the chamber for the selection or non-selection of amendments. I assure you that there was a good reason for the amendment not being selected.

Members who want to take part in the debate should indicate that now. I call Karen Whitefield to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Social Justice Committee.

09:31

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I am pleased to open the debate on the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's report on the links between poverty and drug misuse.

The process of compiling the report was challenging and rewarding, harrowing and hopeful. All of us on the committee learned from the experiences of those who live daily with the effects of drug misuse. I am sure that I speak for all past and present committee members when I say that the report could not have been completed without the hard work of a number of people. In particular, I want to place on record the committee's thanks to our clerks, Lee Bridges, Mary Dinsdale and Rodger Evans. I thank the committee's advisers, Sally Haw and Dr Laurence Gruer, who are in the gallery today, for drawing up the report. I also

thank the Scottish Parliament information centre for its research paper.

Together, that team guided us successfully through what was initially conceived as a short, snappy report, but became a much more thorough and comprehensive study. I am sure that the ever-increasing time scale for the report was in some part indicative of committee members' growing understanding of the complexity and scale of the problem. I believe that the report will be a useful tool in the on-going fight to deal with the devastating effects of drug abuse in our communities.

Finally, I thank all those who gave evidence to the committee, including the workers and volunteers on the many drugs-related projects that we visited during the inquiry. There are hard-working people in communities across Scotland—and indeed in Dublin, where the committee visited several excellent drugs projects—battling to save their communities and loved ones from the devastation that drug misuse can bring. The committee listened closely to their evidence and, we hope, learned from their experiences.

Drug misuse is hurting all of Scotland. However, it is hurting our poorest communities most and, within those communities, it is hurting our most vulnerable people—children, prostitutes and the homeless.

In August 1999, the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee launched its inquiry into the links between drug misuse and social deprivation. The objectives of the inquiry were:

“To examine the interaction between drug misuse and exclusion for individuals, families and communities;

To examine current responses to issues of drug misuse by national and local government, key agencies and services;

To hear evidence from local communities who have attempted to respond to issues of exclusion caused by widespread drug misuse;

To report and make recommendations as appropriate”.

The committee took extensive oral and written evidence from a wide range of agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations. In addition, the committee visited drugs projects in communities across Scotland and in Ireland. Visits to communities in Fife, Grampian, Ayrshire, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dublin allowed the committee to compare the extent of the drug problem in urban and rural communities. The visits also demonstrated the diversity of drugs-related services across the country.

The central aim of the inquiry was to establish the relationship between deprivation levels and drug misuse. The committee found clear and

substantial evidence of such a relationship. Indeed, the contrast between our most affluent and least affluent areas was shocking. The report points out that:

“Analysis of drug-related admissions to general hospitals by place of residence shows rates of admission are on average seventeen times higher in the most disadvantaged areas compared with the most affluent”.

In our poorer communities, certain groups are more likely to become involved in drug misuse, such as young people whose parents have alcohol, drug or other serious problems, young offenders, young people in care, truants and school excludees. Our inquiry also highlighted the particular problem among other socially excluded groups, including prisoners, ex-offenders, the homeless, and street prostitutes. Our report also highlights the strong correlation between deprivation and alcohol-related problems and smoking-related illnesses.

We found that the drug that is causing most harm in our poorer communities is heroin, especially when it is injected or used together with other drugs, such as benzodiazepine tranquillisers and alcohol. The effects of high levels of drug misuse in our most deprived communities are apparent and appalling. It is estimated that the average heroin injector requires £40 to £50 each day to sustain their habit. For the vast majority, that money must be found illegally, through theft, fraud, drug dealing or prostitution.

Our report highlights the findings of a survey that was carried out by Laurence Gruer, which concluded that drug injectors reported committing an average of 26 crimes a month. That figure extrapolates to a total of around 6 million crimes a year being carried out by drug users who are attempting to feed their habit. The effect of that on Scottish communities is devastating. Families and communities are torn apart by fear and mistrust.

The relationship between drug misuse and crime is as clear as the relationship between drug misuse and deprivation. Eighty per cent of prisoners entering prison have been using illegal drugs. Those prisoners often face a particularly dangerous period when they leave prison. Returning to previous heroin doses after a period of little or no drug use often has fatal consequences. The committee received evidence that, in the first nine months of 1999, 24 per cent of the 63 overdose-related deaths of drug misusers in greater Glasgow occurred within two weeks of release from prison and, in more than half those cases, within four days.

Families often face a particularly difficult time. Parents have to endure the pain of watching a son or daughter kill themselves, literally, while enduring the stigma that is attached to being the parent of a heroin user. The problem of what we

do with drug misusers and their families is complex. Many of the drug misusers are dealers, to feed their habits—how do we support the families while at the same time acting on the understandable desire of other members of the community to rid their community of the problem? There is no easy solution to the problem, but it is one with which the Parliament must wrestle.

I have listened to the parents of heroin users in my constituency. Those parents fear for their children's lives and hope desperately that their child will have a future other than an early death or imprisonment. Those women and others like them are the human face of the misery of drug misuse in Scotland. I am pleased that the report recognises the plight of such families. It is vital that they receive the support and assistance that they so desperately need.

The report points out that, of the 1,140 women who have registered with the Base 75 social care service for prostitutes, 90 per cent are drug injectors. Further analysis of Base 75 information confirms that the vast majority of those women come from the most deprived areas of the city. It is vital that we find ways of supporting them and enabling them to escape the cycle of poverty and drug misuse.

Our report concludes that, worryingly, the problem in Scotland is growing. Between 1990 and 1999, acute general hospital admissions for drug misuse rose from 944 to 4,234. The report also highlights the increase in drug-related deaths over the past decade. Deaths among people who are known or suspected to be drug dependent have risen from 139 in 1994 to 227 in 1999, while the number of new patients attending drug misuse services in Scotland has risen from 2,980 in 1992-93 to 9,500 in 1998-99. Those alarming statistics demonstrate not only the scale of the problem, but the need for clear and immediate action.

Tommy Sheridan: Does Karen Whitefield agree that when the committee produced its report, it encountered the problem of compiling reliable statistics? The tragic statistics that she just related are often contradicted by other statistics—I will refer later to some statistics from the Registrar General for Scotland. Does she expect the effective interventions unit to be able to provide reliable statistics for everyone to use in the coming months?

Karen Whitefield: The committee found that there was a need to ensure the availability of accurate statistics, so that we can not only trace the money that is being invested in services but ensure an even distribution of service provision throughout Scotland. The committee highlighted in its recommendations that those issues are not being addressed at present.

The committee found good examples of positive action across Scotland and throughout all sectors. Local authorities provide a range of drug-related services, many of which are offered through social work departments. Work is often done in partnership with other council services, such as housing and education.

The committee found that services offered by health boards and trusts varied across the country and within health board areas. Greater Glasgow Health Board highlighted the

“uneven spread of addiction services geographically throughout Glasgow”.

Good examples were also highlighted, including one from Lanarkshire Primary Care NHS Trust, which enhanced mainstream services, such as methadone prescribing and needle exchanges, by providing shared-care clinics, self-help groups, a link to detox services for new-born children and funding for a group that aims to move drug users on into college and employment. I expect some of my colleagues to talk about their experiences with Ayrshire and Arran Primary Care NHS Trust and the Borders Primary Care NHS Trust.

The committee examined the range of services and initiatives that are run by Scottish prisons. A good example of partnership work is in place at HMP Low Moss, which has a service level agreement with local social work departments for the provision of counselling, group work and throughcare. Other members of the committee visited HMP Barlinnie, and I am sure that they will speak about that experience during the debate.

The report also highlights the broad range of drug-related work that is done by voluntary groups and the churches.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): The member passed over prisons, but it is important to emphasise what the committee said. In the words of the committee report, the services in prisons, which we are desperate to improve, are “woefully inadequate”. The member mentioned good practice, but we want to spread that good practice.

Karen Whitefield: I agree with Mr Raffan, but I thought that he would probably make a detailed contribution on services in prisons.

Groups such as Crew 2000, Mothers Against Drugs and West Lothian Drug and Alcohol Service provide drugs information that is focused primarily on young people. Other projects, such as West Fife Community Drugs Project, aim to identify at-risk groups and to provide positive alternatives to drug taking.

In my constituency, the Shotts addiction unit is an excellent example of how local volunteers can provide support and guidance to drug abusers.

Volunteers such as Francis Fallan give up their time and energy freely to help people with drug problems, because they are committed to their communities and because they are more interested in providing help to drug users than in judging them. It is important that central and local government not only recognise the value of volunteers, but assist them actively in their efforts to make our communities better places in which to live.

I do not intend to go through each of the report's recommendations—I am sure that they will all be covered during the debate. However, I will highlight some of the main recommendations that the committee made.

As I said earlier, the inquiry's central aim was to establish the extent of the link between drug misuse and deprivation. Having established a strong correlation, the committee recommended that the Government should undertake further research into that link. That would provide a more complete picture of the nature and scale of the problem and allow some measurement of the changes in the problem over a period.

The committee concluded that action must be taken to ensure that resources for tackling drug misuse are targeted at our most deprived areas.

Tommy Sheridan: The committee's recommendation is absolutely spot on, but does the member agree that the proportion of the rehabilitation and treatment money that will go to City of Glasgow Council is woefully inadequate, as it represents only 12 per cent of the overall budget? The social work department estimates that it would require at least 30 to 40 per cent of that budget.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): It would have to come from the fishermen.

Karen Whitefield: The committee's point was that we must be able to trace where the resources are going, particularly in relation to rehabilitation services. We discovered that it was difficult to trace that money—that is the point that we wished to flag up to the Executive.

As I was saying, resources for tackling drug misuse must be targeted at our most deprived areas. That should also be reflected in allocations to all geographical social inclusion partnerships. The committee felt that an element of the budget should be hypothecated for use in drug misuse projects.

The committee recognised the value and potential of drug action teams, but was concerned about the apparent variations in the performance of DATs around the country. The committee also had some concerns that the membership of DATS

often does not reflect the communities that the teams serve. For those reasons, the committee recommended that the Scottish Executive review the responsibilities, membership and performance of DATs.

The committee recognised the importance of employment and training opportunities, not just for those who are recovering from drug addiction but for those young people who are at risk of becoming involved in substance misuse. Some of my colleagues intend to expand on that part of the report.

A central finding of the report was the need to increase resources to tackle the drug problem in Scotland. The committee welcomed the Executive's additional £100 million investment over the next three years. In addition, a number of the committee's recommendations seek to ensure not just that more funding is available, but that that funding is targeted properly at those communities and people most in need—I think that was the point that Tommy Sheridan was attempting to make.

Recommendations 12 to 14 focus on the need to support families of drug users. The committee felt strongly that families were an essential part of the solution to drug misuse. With that in mind, it is vital that families receive practical support and guidance and that they do not become isolated or shunned by their communities.

The committee recognised the importance of education and access to good-quality information, and recommended that local authorities should ensure that all schools place a high priority on drug misuse prevention and education, including access to staff training. Further, we felt that there should be stronger communication links between DATs and local education services.

The committee took a range of evidence on drug treatment and care services. We welcomed the news that measures such as needle exchanges were having a positive impact on the spread of HIV among intravenous drug users. We also welcomed the announcement of an additional £37.5 million for treatment and rehabilitation initiatives throughout Scotland. However, we remained concerned about the increasing rates of hepatitis B and C and encouraged the Scottish Executive and the DATs to ensure that drug injectors have

"ready but well controlled access to needle exchange services."

We also recommended that the Scottish Executive should consider further steps to stop the spread of hepatitis B and C.

A further recommendation concerned methadone. The committee took a wide range of

evidence on the efficacy of methadone—which features in the news today. My colleagues and I recognised that communities have some concerns about the use of methadone, but based on the evidence that we received, we concluded that:

"methadone is currently the best available treatment for many heroin addicts."

We recommended that:

"The Scottish Executive should encourage and enable a major expansion of tightly controlled methadone programmes throughout Scotland".

However, methadone is not an answer in itself. We concluded that such an expansion of services should be linked to enhanced training opportunities, employment and rehabilitation. Methadone can work as a stabilising therapy only if it is accompanied by other opportunities for escaping the cycle of drug misuse.

The committee's report into the relationship between deprivation and drug misuse is detailed and extensive. However, it only scratches at the surface of a frighteningly large and complex social problem. It should be viewed not as an end product, but as a starting point. If one thing can be learned from the report, it is that the solution to the drug problem must involve working with our communities, rather than solely working for them. The people who live in places such as Castlemilk, Easterhouse, Muirhouse and Craigneuk know and understand the problem in a way that an academic conducting a study does not. We must ensure that those communities are given the resources and support that they need to combat drug misuse. We must ensure that those communities are actively involved in the creation and implementation of drug strategies.

The fight against drug misuse demands that all sections of Scottish society and the Parliament work in partnership. I hope that the report provides a useful tool in the building of such a partnership.

I commend the report to Parliament and move,

That the Parliament notes the content and recommendations of the 6th Report 2000 of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, *Inquiry into Drug Misuse and Deprived Communities*.

09:51

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Iain Gray): I will start by saying how much the Executive welcomes the committee's report. We agree with most of the findings. We fully accept and recognise, above all, that there are strong links between problem drug misuse and social deprivation. More than that, we welcome any contribution to the effort to tackle drug misuse in Scotland. As Karen Whitefield said, the committee expanded its exhaustive and meticulous work beyond its initial aims, and its work is testament to

the priority that its members gave to the matter.

In the Executive's detailed response to the committee's recommendations, which was published last month, I hope we showed that vigorous action is being targeted at those communities that are most in need of positive and sustained intervention. That action will ensure that the scourge of drug misuse in those vulnerable, disadvantaged communities is tackled effectively. I confirm that the resources are now in place to back that up.

We have taken on board many of the committee's recommendations. For example, we are committed to ensuring that there are better training and employment opportunities for problem drug misusers who want to make something of their lives. We are also committed to building up the links between drug action teams and social inclusion partnerships and to improving the way in which DATs involve communities in developing local solutions to drug problems.

It would be foolish of me to pretend that we have all the answers. However, I am sure of two things, both of which are reflected in the report. The first is found in the answer to the question, "Where can we find the strength and the will to tackle drugs?" The answer is clear: it must come from within the communities that suffer the effects of drugs.

Secondly, we must support and mobilise that strength through partnerships between parents and families, the voluntary sector, health, housing, social work, education and the police. Those partnerships are reflected in the drug action teams, which are responsible for shaping locally sensitive drug strategies and for building services around the real and changing nature of localised drug misuse patterns. Karen Whitefield was quite right to say that the committee discovered that the problem is complex and multilayered. As such, it needs a complex and multilayered response.

Our overall framework strategy document, "Tackling Drugs in Scotland: Action in Partnership," was itself an exercise in partnership. The document was drawn up with the support of a wide range of interests and is based on some fundamental principles: inclusion, partnership, understanding and accountability.

Although the strategy was published in May 1999, it needs to evolve to meet new challenges and a fast-developing agenda. We looked carefully at the committee's recommendations and took them into account when allocating the £100 million package of new expenditure on drug misuse that we are making available over the next three years.

The Executive funds a wide range of initiatives to fight poverty in Scotland and the extra drugs funding will back that up. For instance, the extra £10 million that has been given for treatment funds

also takes account of local needs—deprivation is a key factor.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister agree that we are not as aware as we might be of the true prevalence of drug misuse throughout Scotland? The information that has been used to allocate the money is based on indicators that do not necessarily reflect actual need or drug misuse throughout the country.

Iain Gray: I will say a little more later about how the money has been allocated, but the allocations must be based on the statistics that we have on the prevalence of drug misuse. Our prevalence information needs to be improved. I will also say a little about how that can be done.

The £5 million that is channelled through social inclusion partnerships will, by definition, go to communities in which there is significant social exclusion. Eighteen million pounds will be made available through the changing children's services fund. The allocations will take account of the numbers of looked-after children, as well as deprivation and rurality factors.

The result for Glasgow is that the city's drug action team was able, yesterday, to discuss how it would use some £9.5 million of additional resource. That figure did not take account of the resources that are available for employment initiatives, or the resources that follow ex-prisoners as they leave prison, or the funds that are attached to pilots, such as the drug courts pilot that will take place in Glasgow.

Tommy Sheridan: Glasgow City Council's social work services directorate reports that its share of the £21 million that has been set aside for rehabilitation is only 12 per cent of the overall fund—which corresponds exactly to Glasgow's share of the population—yet the level of Glasgow's problem, which is much more concentrated, is much higher. How does the minister respond to that?

Iain Gray: The package must be looked at as a whole. The component of the package to which Tommy Sheridan refers was distributed in the same way as local authority grant-aided expenditure. There is a discussion on how the money should be distributed, but the money is part of the local authority GAE. If one looks at the whole package, the proportion is skewed, because—as I have tried to explain—other components take much greater account of factors such as deprivation.

Many local authorities and voluntary agencies find that their work with children, young people and their families can be affected significantly by the actual or potential risk of drug misuse. Many child protection incidents can be linked directly to parents who misuse drugs and whose chaotic

lifestyles, tragically, put their children at risk. That is why £18 million will, over the next three years, be aimed at specialist prevention and treatment services for under-16s; anti-drugs work with persistent young offenders; education to prevent drug misuse among children and young people in the care system; and work with children who are affected by drug misuse in the family.

We expect local authorities and other relevant agencies to work together closely on the planning and delivery of services for children and young people. All applications to access the new funding will have to be endorsed by the local drug action team. We need to intervene early—earlier than in the past—and to provide fully integrated services if we are to tackle successfully the multiple factors that lead young people into involvement with drugs.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The minister has made some points about children that I take on board fully. How will that money help in circumstances where parents are totally committed to their drugs habit and will not change? How will it help the children who face those circumstances at home?

Iain Gray: One of the ways in which the money will help is that the children in those circumstances often become the key carers in the family—often without any recognition or support. Fundamentally, those resources should allow much greater access to services that will allow people to stabilise their lives and therefore be better parents. I have met some of the people whom we are talking about—I will say something about that later—and that is what they want us to do.

One of the key recommendations in the committee's report is that we need to assist drug users to move on from treatment. In the past, there has been an assumption that, once a drug user is receiving some form of treatment, that person will be ready to tackle life afresh. The reality is different.

We must provide the necessary help for recovering addicts to develop the self-confidence, motivation and skills that are needed to progress to training or employment. We will consider what support we can give to employers so that those who are motivated to give up drugs have the opportunity to get practical experience. Nothing could better reflect the pleas that I hear from those people in treatment and rehabilitation whom I meet on my visits to projects.

Over the next three years, £6.5 million will be dedicated to help 3,000 drug misusers prepare for training and employment. However, money is not the only issue. Users and ex-users find it notoriously difficult to move into work. Many have few or no qualifications, many have missed out on

years of school, and many have criminal records. Their lives have been chaotic for many years. Above all, potential employers too often treat them as pariahs. For those reasons, overcoming barriers to employment is one of the key priorities in the work programme of the Executive's effective interventions unit. The unit will consider the views and experiences of employers, training providers and clients. Its findings will provide a secure foundation for practical work on this topic.

Two nights ago, I addressed the new deal advisory task force on exactly those issues and, at ministerial level, the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and Gaelic has joined the ministerial committee on tackling drug misuse to ensure that employment and opportunity are at the centre of our thinking.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): In the Executive's response, I notice the identification of the need for new deal personal advisers to be able to refer on drug users as part of their work. I have serious concerns about the training of those advisers. The expectations of what they can do are perhaps a bit too high.

Iain Gray: That is not a responsibility that can fall on one sector. We must involve the Employment Service—especially locally—with drug action teams, so that no one is operating in isolation but instead as part of the whole panoply of services available. We are investing in a new training programme, which will be based in Glasgow. I hope that employment service personnel will be among the groups of people who undertake training.

In communities throughout Scotland, we can begin to see the effects of our approach. On Tuesday, I had the pleasure of visiting the Hope self-help project in Bo'ness, which is a fine example of community involvement and commitment that was drawn to my attention by Cathy Peattie, the local MSP. The project was conceived and created by local people. It helps drug users to recover in the community and provides support for families. It provides all-round support for people—from helping them to seek rehousing to getting them on harm reduction or detoxification programmes. Everyone is treated as an individual and given the support that they need. Contact with other agencies is local and direct, so it works. The chair and leader, Jackie Johnston, said:

“Every door we knock on opens for us.”

That is a real definition of local partnership in action. Those who have succeeded through the project are ploughing their success back into it, as volunteers and as examples for new clients. Such local initiatives have a crucial—no, an essential—part to play if we are to impact seriously on the

drugs problem. I wish that I could convey to the chamber the sense of healing that is evoked by the Hope project—lives healed, families healed, a community healed.

We have to enable communities to mobilise in that way everywhere in Scotland. The large urban areas have acute social problems that can only be exacerbated when drug misuse is rife. However, we must not forget the rural areas of Scotland, which also suffer from the drug menace. The total funding for each local area represents a comprehensive package that takes account of real needs. Every area is receiving additional resources.

Central to the most effective use of those resources are the drug action teams. We acknowledge that they have a difficult job to do. We have increased funding support to DATs and the DAT Association to £1.6 million per annum. We are consulting them on what improvements in information we can provide that will help them.

In the past few days, we have announced new provision of training for the next three years for professionals who work with people who misuse drugs and alcohol. That will be based in Glasgow and will be a key element of the national policies for tackling both drug and alcohol misuse. We have set specific national targets and standards, which span enforcement, education, treatment and rehabilitation. For the first time, Scotland has clear and measurable targets to work towards in our efforts to curb the supply of, and the demand for, drugs.

My key task in the next two years, if I am spared, is to turn—

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): What?

Iain Gray: I mean spared in the ministerial sense.

My key task is to turn the resources into real service improvements and to follow them through and ensure that they are effective.

The last of the four themes that I referred to earlier was understanding. Ministers are often accused of not listening to communities and of not giving our communities a voice in how things should be taken forward. However, members can be assured that the Executive is determined to ensure that community views will inform the work of DATs and the local constituent agencies. I think that the majority of DATs would acknowledge that their links with local communities could be better. We are issuing guidance on partnership working, and our planning framework for services and the monitoring of DAT activity will consider their engagement with communities—particularly deprived communities.

Every arm of government must galvanise itself if success is to be achieved. There are encouraging signs. Only a fortnight ago, I was able to welcome the new lottery money that was made available under the new opportunities fund for drug rehabilitation programmes. That amounts to £10 million over and above the £100 million package.

When it comes to listening to the grass roots, we have to show the way. Last year, we held a major drugs conference in the autumn. At the centre of it was my predecessor's announcement of additional resources. Unfortunately, we cannot do that every year—although we are sometimes accused of announcing funding more than once. We will hold the conference again this autumn and this time it will be about community involvement—about learning from the grass roots. The aim of the conference will be to encourage dialogue and the exchange of information and good practice between the professionals and community interests. I intend that as many grass-roots community groupings as possible will take part.

We all know that the problems that are associated with drug misuse for drug users, families and the wider community are extremely serious. They have to be high on everyone's agenda. We must strive towards concerted action to deal with the drug problem.

We are giving the political lead. We are providing unprecedented resources. We are listening to the professionals, to the Social Justice Committee and to the grass roots. Together, locally and nationally, we are acting. We have a real opportunity to lift our communities and to make the biggest ever co-ordinated effort against drug misuse in Scotland. The committee report is a contribution to that. I believe that we can succeed.

10:08

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I commend Karen Whitefield on her presentation of the report of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee. I also place on record my thanks to the clerks and to the special advisers who were involved in preparing the report.

I want to emphasise one thing that Karen Whitefield said—the committee's view that this was the start, not the end, of the Parliament's continuous examination of this issue. I also note Iain Gray's personal commitment to this issue, first as Deputy Minister for Community Care and now as Deputy Minister for Justice. I am not quite sure whether we heard, in his earlier aside, a plea to keep his present job or a pitch for another job.

If anything is certain about the drug issue, it is that there is no one drug problem and there is no one drug solution. The public are sick of glib

pronouncements from politicians about drugs and I am very pleased that, in this Parliament, however slowly, we are developing a more progressive and less sensationalist attitude to the drug issue—an attitude that recognises the complexities. Politicians and the Executive cannot be expected single-handedly to rid Scotland of the harm that drugs cause in society. We are all in this together and drugs affect us all. That means that all of us have a responsibility in dealing with the issue.

The tone of the debate here in Scotland has allowed us to start to build a broad consensus. I hope that the minister can acknowledge that he has space to move into wider areas, rather than the traditional law enforcement aspects that dominated when Westminster controlled this issue. We can start talking more about drug misuse as an illness that needs to be treated, without the political posturing that marked so much of Westminster's attitude in this debate.

When the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, of which I was a member at the time of this inquiry, decided to address this issue, there was much debate about the inquiry remit. One of the main arguments was that we should tackle alcohol as part of a wider substance misuse inquiry; however, it was decided to tackle illegal drugs, although where we came across reference to alcohol we would include it. Indeed, one of the points in the report is the link between abuse of alcohol by parents and the propensity for abuse of illegal drugs by their children.

I also argued that we should embark on a cross-cutting inquiry with members of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and the Health and Community Care Committee to examine the issue, but that was rejected, because at the time we agreed that the committee would kick off the inquiry, and if the Parliament chose to advance it in a wider area it could do so.

We recognised that drug misuse knows no class boundaries, but we decided that we would examine the impact of drugs on deprived communities. The committee did not, and does not, argue that serious drug misuse is confined exclusively to deprived communities. However, it was in recognition of the fact that the inquiry could not deal with all aspects of drug misuse that we decided upon a narrower remit. The inquiry does not look at justice issues, health issues or education issues in any depth, although there are references to them.

We held two inquiries in the committee last year. The first was on housing stock transfer, which was a technical inquiry that was mainly, although not exclusively, about housing finance. The drugs inquiry was quite different. It took members out of

the parliamentary complex and into communities throughout Scotland. The inquiry was first and foremost about people's personal experiences. We received very touching, sometimes heart-rending, stories and accounts from mothers of users, users themselves and grandparents. I thank them for sharing their personal experiences with us. I will reflect on some of those experiences before moving on to some of the recommendations and the Government's response to them.

I visited the kingdom of Fife with John McAllion, and it was clear that heroin was prevalent throughout that county, for example, in small villages in the Levenmouth area. The report highlights our concerns that rural areas often are badly served by medical support.

I spoke to a young mother, who had been a wife but is now a widow, and has become a criminal. She was no different from most people in society. She was happy and content with a job until, in her mid-20s, with two young children to look after, her husband died suddenly. She could not cope. She began abusing alcohol and then descended into illegal drug abuse. Frighteningly rapidly, she started taking heroin, while still holding down a job and with two young children. She was getting through the pain. Things got worse, she was using more and she lost her job. She started shoplifting in Kirkcaldy, requiring £80 a day to feed her habit. She was caught, jailed and fined, and her children were taken into care.

The young woman decided to come off drugs and was prescribed methadone as a substitute. She reacted badly to it, but she could not get an alternative, because her general practitioner was unable to prescribe anything else as she already had a prescribed commitment. She wanted to go into residential rehabilitation, but that was a pipe dream because, as the report says, rehabilitation provision is woefully inadequate. She wants her children back desperately. She wants to get off drugs and to secure a happy home with her children. She knows that she has to get off drugs and stabilise herself. When I met her, she had decided that the only way to get herself off drugs was to start using heroin again and steadily reduce the dosage herself. She was doing that, but she had to keep stealing to feed her habit, which meant that she was still part of the massive criminal activity in this country. She is as much a victim as she is somebody committing a crime.

When people think about drug abuse and abusers, they often do not think about women with children. As part of the inquiry, I visited Brenda House, which provides residential treatment for women with children. At that time, its future was not secure, and although it provided services for women from all over Scotland, City of Edinburgh

Council was picking up most of the tab. We must support women with children, and I welcome the Executive's response on that. Women under-report drug abuse and abuse drugs longer before they report for help, because they fear what will happen to their children. We have to send out a strong supportive message to those women who want help.

We launched the report in a hostel in the Grassmarket, and in the same room I met staff from homeless projects in the city. They were frustrated and concerned about their clients, who are so exposed. I was struck by the compassion of homeless and rough sleepers as they spoke of their concern for other rough sleepers, especially younger rough sleepers and ex-offenders, who quite easily fall into drug abuse. I was told that if we do not get them before they have been on the streets for six weeks, they will be on hard drugs. The growth of heroin use by rough sleepers, particularly in this city, is alarming.

The other alarming concern that was expressed to me was the ticking time bomb of hepatitis C among drug users. Young people in this city are sharing needles and using heroin as part of their social scene because it is trendy, but they ignore the message about clean needles. They think that it is just the old druggies in Edinburgh who die because of AIDS, but it is the younger users who now are catching hepatitis C. The long-term impact on our health service is serious. Hepatitis C can be extremely debilitating, and indeed it is a costly disease to treat. Frankly, the Executive's response to the committee's recommendations on this issue was weak. I would like to hear more about the public health campaign and the planning and provision of medical treatment.

In Wester Hailes I heard of the problems faced by family self-help groups, which are struggling even to book rooms to meet, let alone provide telephone lines and staff to help the mothers and fathers of drug abusers. I heard from parents and police about the black market, which is a consequence of the need to finance an expensive habit through crime. We have to replace the cycle of drugs and the related black economy in our deprived communities with something positive if we are to break the cycle for the next generation. That means jobs and hope, rather than desperation, misery, depression and hopelessness. That means the regeneration of our communities, investment and jobs. Those are as much a part of the solution as are law enforcement or education. That is a key recommendation in the report.

We heard in committee from grandparents who are struggling, with little support, to bring up grandchildren whose parents are users. The Executive's response is weak on that issue. Those

grandparents want changes to social security system rules. I know that that is a reserved matter, but the Executive should take up the views that are expressed in the committee report and those of the grandparents. Will the Executive make representations on that issue? Leaving it all to emergency social work payments is not what those grandparents want—that is not sufficient.

I will go over some of the Executive's responses. The Executive says that DATs will be required to sign up to jointly agreed plans, but I question how much clout the DATs will have if they do not hold the purse-strings. We found that much depends on the calibre and enthusiasm of individuals to drive matters forward. I know that Angus MacKay was involved in meeting all the DATs to find out what they were doing. I hope that that monitoring will continue. In its response, the Executive talked about national standards for all DATs and social inclusion partnerships, and joint working. We would like more detail on that.

Recommendation 7 in the committee's report is on training and employment opportunities. We welcome the announcement of the resources for this area. The cost of implementing the Beattie committee report is £22.6 million. The Parliament would welcome more information, as part of a continuing discussion on this issue.

Recommendation 8 is on the new deal. I am concerned about personal advisers and how they will be equipped to deal with people who are seeking help.

Iain Gray mentioned that health board allocations for drug treatment centres are to be based on a formula that links to deprivation and need, in balance with GAE and social work, but the formula must also link to prevalence and service provision. I echo the point that was made to me by professionals in Edinburgh, which is that Edinburgh has to provide national resources. If Arbutnott is developed, there is an issue about what will happen in Edinburgh and Lothians.

Iain Gray: I have two points that I hope the member will acknowledge. First, as I meant to say in my speech but time did not allow, we are undertaking a national prevalence study. In the course of a previous intervention I acknowledged that we can improve the statistics, and we will have to respond to them with regard to the distribution.

Secondly, when we consider health treatment money, one factor is that, in the past, Edinburgh and Glasgow received disproportionately more than their share of resources, because there was a time when folk thought that those were the only places where there was a drug problem. It is good to see other parts of Scotland receiving support.

Fiona Hyslop: I appreciate that intervention.

This is an issue that we must come back to, because the jury is out about the specifics and the research. The commitment to making sure that we have more information is welcome, because one of the committee's criticisms was that the evidence that we heard, at least initially, from civil service officials left us questioning its robustness.

We welcome the Executive's response on recommendation 29, on female drug addicts with children.

Recommendation 31 is about the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency and the need for monitoring and accountability. That is a serious point, which has been expressed to me by senior police officers because, as Iain Gray said, the accountability of the SDEA is not as overt as it could be.

Iain Gray: I did not refer to that recommendation. The key problem with accountability for the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency is the broader issue of accountability for common service agencies in the police. The member knows that we are addressing that issue.

Fiona Hyslop: I welcome that comment. I simply wanted to put our concern on the record. We can monitor how the SDEA is accountable through the minister and to the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): Last minute.

Fiona Hyslop: About £100 million will be awarded through all the funds. However, there is concern about the speed with which that money will reach front-line services. There must be some monitoring of its progress from announcement to delivery. I spoke to Lothian Health Board and social work departments, which raised issues about that.

I call again on the Parliament to implement the report's final recommendation—recommendation 36—which says:

"A cross-party inquiry, commission, committee, or other structure should be initiated by Parliament to inquire into the broader problems of 'substance abuse'."

The Government recognises that that is not its responsibility. If I may use the term "you" in the proper debating sense, perhaps it is for you, Presiding Officer, and the Parliament to respond to that recommendation.

The inquiry and its recommendations are already dated. The drugs issue moves quickly. The use of heroin and its increased availability in this city were brought to the committee's attention 10 months ago. At that point, there had been an explosion in numbers in the previous 12 months. We must constantly report and make recommendations to keep up to speed and be

relevant.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please wind up.

Fiona Hyslop: That is why we must undertake a continuous study and accept recommendation 36 for a cross-party inquiry commission that constantly reports to Parliament.

10:22

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I echo the thanks given to the committee clerks and those who supported the committee in its deliberations. The inquiry was a good exercise. All committee members considered the matter closely. They came from different angles and different points of view and produced a report that is constructive and cohesive. People such as me, who regard enforcement as a major issue, listened carefully to what Keith Raffan, who takes a somewhat different approach, said. Everyone learned from one another. The conclusions and the rest of the report should be commended to Parliament in the strongest terms.

In many respects, the report is a depressing document. It is a harrowing catalogue of the effect that drug abuse and drug addiction have on many communities. It is hardly surprising that the committee's unanimous conclusion was that the most affected communities are those that are deprived. However, perhaps a little more surprising to people such as me was the effect that drug addiction has in Highland, island and rural communities, many of which have been badly affected by this modern-day scourge.

The figures in the report make stark reading. As I said, I found some of the evidence harrowing. There are estimated to be more than 30,000 drug addicts in Scotland. In Glasgow, 4 per cent of the adult population are addicts, most of whom inject heroin. Perhaps the most terrifying and evocative piece of evidence that the committee heard was that, in Glasgow, between 7,000 and 10,000 youngsters have parents who are drug addicts.

There is evidence of families in which three generations have fallen to the scourge of heroin. The Scottish granny, who has always been a much-loved and revered figure, frequently nowadays has the awesome responsibility of bringing up children from infancy, because the children's parents cannot cope without drugs. Iain Gray highlighted the fact that, in many cases, parents are looked after by children, such is the effect of drugs in some communities.

Nobody's life is untouched by drugs. On the streets of Glasgow and Edinburgh, the pitiful sight of drug addicts begging is there for all to see. The level of prostitution is high because of the necessity to feed an all-consuming drug habit.

Those who have been the victims of petty crime have lost property in order that some addict can come up with the £350 a week that it is estimated is necessary to feed a habit.

It is no exaggeration to say that drugs are the biggest crisis that faces Scotland. There is no quick fix or easy solution. The committee began its work with a blank sheet of paper. Soon, that was filled with an appalling catalogue of figures. There was overwhelming evidence of the way in which poorer communities in Scotland are being handicapped and, in many cases, crucified by the effects of drugs.

I said that there was no quick fix. Some parts of the report highlight that fact, such as the evidence of Dr Charles Lind. I asked him how long it took for the effects of his programme to become manifest. He said that it could take between 10 and 12 years from entry to a programme to leaving it—sorting someone out. The committee went to Ireland to see whether we could learn from its experience, particularly in Dublin. The Irish were happy with a 15 per cent success rate. I understand their reasoning for being happy with that, but that is a stark illustration of what we are up against.

Many of us would draw the inescapable, and arguably simplistic, conclusion that the best way of curing a problem is by preventing it, and that we should ensure that addicts cannot get drugs. That is basically what I would say. However, I realise that there is a lot more to the issue. There are three answers: enforcement, prevention and cure. To ensure that all those answers are effective, they must be interrelated and synchronised. There is evidence in the report that such synchronisation is not in place.

Tommy Sheridan: Does the member accept that the detail that he described and the order in which he listed those solutions are contrary to the report? Unfortunately, enforcement was top of the Tory agenda for far too long. Enforcement is not the way to tackle drug misuse. The report makes the point that education, treatment and prevention are much higher priorities than enforcement. Does the member accept that the strategy that the previous Conservative Government pursued was wrong?

Bill Aitken: I do not accept that. I am making the point that a three-pronged attack is necessary. Enforcement is a vital component of that. However, I accept that, as I clearly said, prevention and treatment come into consideration. We should now consider how to improve all the treatment facilities. The committee heard evidence that sometimes Government agencies have not got their acts together. The DATs and SIPs must examine the ways in which they conduct their business, to make their approaches more cohesive.

Health boards too must consider the problem. Perhaps unusually, I take the previous point that Tommy Sheridan made, when he highlighted the fact that health board resources are not targeted at areas where the drug problem is more manifest.

Iain Gray: I offer clarification, because I am unsure about the point that is being made. There is a follow-up point to the previous discussion with Tommy Sheridan. There are differences in prevalence within health board areas. How the health boards, in conjunction with the DATs, spend their money in the different parts of their areas is important.

Bill Aitken: I accept that, but I think that the deputy minister would also accept that targeting is important not only in health, but in criminal justice issues. We should not necessarily link targeting to a health board's area, which we all know can be very wide.

We must consider several aspects to enforcement. Let us consider sentencing. In the United States, if one is caught peddling drugs, sentences of 25 years are sometimes imposed. I am not suggesting that such sentences are a way forward, but they certainly seem to have a deterrent effect.

Tommy Sheridan: What is the effect? America has the worst drug problems in the world.

Bill Aitken: I must carry on. I am running out of time.

The rules of evidence have to be examined. I have made it quite clear in the past that I am always a little twitchy about interfering with the basic tenets of Scots law on corroboration, but I have no difficulty in supporting the measures that the Executive seeks to introduce to confiscate the assets of those who are convicted of drug pushing.

The Conservative party supports drugs courts. I highlight that they may help, but they are certainly not the exclusive answer. Basically, a drugs court can do a limited amount more than a conventional court. The same disposals of probation, drugs testing orders and deferred sentencing are available to a conventional court. If sheriffs do not have the necessary degree of expertise in dealing with drugs cases, I question where they have been, as something like 60 per cent of the criminal cases with which sheriffs deal are related to drugs.

Prevention is, of course, vital. We simply must attempt to get to grips with the young people. We have to adopt a more subtle approach. We must ensure that employment opportunities exist. Although recommendation 9 contains a danger of rewarding disruptive and anti-social behaviour to some extent, I am prepared to support it. We must ensure that prisons are drugs-free. We must

ensure that the education of parents and children is adequate. I highlight recommendation 16.

I definitely felt sorry for the people whom we saw in HMP Barlinnie who were making a genuine effort to rehabilitate themselves. The tragedy is that, once they are released from prison, they will probably be tapped on the bus back home and offered drugs—a freebie, for want of a better word, to get them hooked again. Sadly, the ability of society—in particular, social work departments—to do anything constructive to help those individuals is very constrained indeed. That has to be examined. Those who are prepared to peddle drugs in their communities should receive no mercy, but those who are sincerely prepared to rehabilitate themselves deserve the support that the Parliament can give them.

I underline Fiona Hyslop's point that the matter cannot end here. I have said—and few would disagree—that drugs affect every component of Scottish society. It is arguably the most important issue that faces the Parliament. We cannot simply adopt the report and leave it to be filed away and forgotten about. There has to be a continuing process. That process should be led by the Executive, which should set up a cross-party committee. We should examine the situation, which is ever-changing, and be prepared to do certain things as and when the solutions emerge.

The report is good. There is much in it with which the Parliament should be able to make progress. Once again, I congratulate my colleagues on their input into a very complex and worrying matter.

10:33

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

I congratulate Karen Whitefield on her introduction to the debate. I join colleagues in thanking the committee's clerks, Martin Verity and Lee Bridges, and our special advisers, Laurence Gruer of the Greater Glasgow Health Board and Sally Haw of the Health Education Board for Scotland. They managed to order the sometimes complex, if not confused, thoughts of committee members. I hasten to add that that includes me.

There are 36 recommendations in the report, but a far more important achievement is in the person of Margaret Curran, who is sitting on the right of the Deputy Minister for Justice. She knows that I am not prone to flattery, but the committee's signal success was the infiltration of the Government—particularly of the Executive's ministerial committee on drug misuse—by our convener, who presided over the inquiry. I do not think that any other committee has yet achieved such success. I say to colleagues of all parties that the best thing that we did to ensure that all 36 recommendations

are implemented in full and that resources are greatly increased was to get the convener into the Government. I am pleased that three members of the ministerial committee are here. I know that they all have busy schedules, but it is important that they listen to the debate.

The report says:

“drug misuse is one of the most serious problems affecting Scotland today”.

That is correct. The editor of the *Daily Record*, however, wrote to me yesterday and said:

“Drugs are the biggest social problem we have.”

That is incorrect. Alcohol misuse kills more people and wrecks more lives. In Scotland, there are 30,000 to 40,000 injecting addicts. There are probably 200,000 to 250,000 problematic alcohol users.

Over the past 10 years, the drugs problem has indisputably become far more serious. It has spread out from urban centres to smaller towns and rural areas. Drug misuse hits deprived communities hardest. The admission of drug-related cases to hospital is 17 times higher in our most deprived areas compared to our most affluent ones.

The two most damaging consequences are obvious. The first is crime. Karen Whitefield, who, I am glad to see, has just come back into the chamber, made it clear in her speech—I have just congratulated you, Ms Whitefield—that it costs at least £50 per day and £18,000 per year to finance a drug habit. That habit is financed through theft—to an estimated value of £190 million every year in Glasgow alone—shoplifting, fraud, prostitution and dealing. Users probably steal over £500 million a year to pay for drugs in Scotland as a whole. Each problematic drug user commits on average 26 crimes per month, which amounts to 6 million drug-related crimes in a year, most of which are unreported. That is the scale of the problem.

Crime is one of the two most damaging consequences of drug misuse—the other is ill health. That can be seen most clearly in the hepatitis C epidemic that Scotland faces. As the general manager of one of the three health boards in my regional constituency said, hepatitis C is a “time bomb” under the NHS. We have debated the issue, and had a response from the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care. The Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health's latest figures show that there are 10,161 cases of hepatitis C in Scotland. However, as the minister knows, those figures have an ominous asterisk attached, which leads to a footnote that says that those figures are almost certainly a gross underestimate and that the number of unknown cases exceeds that of known cases “several-fold”. We are probably talking about more

than 40,000 cases in Scotland as a whole.

The Minister for Health and Community Care was right to commission a Scottish needs assessment programme report on the issue. We must tackle the problem. As the minister knows, if we do not deal with it, 15 to 20 years down the line we will have a virtual epidemic of cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer and there will be an overwhelming demand for liver transplants. The combination therapy of interferon alpha and ribavirin is expensive—it costs £7,000 to £9,000 per course of treatment. That poses a huge problem for the national health service in Scotland, but it must be addressed.

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way?

Mr Raffan: Not at this stage.

The committee and the Executive are at one in their approach; we both want a balanced approach. Unlike Mr Sheridan, I recognise the need for enforcement, although I lean more towards treatment and rehabilitation. We must cut supply through enforcement and cut demand through treatment, rehabilitation, education and prevention. There is a gap between the position of the Executive and that of the committee—although it is narrowing, thanks to the approach of Margaret Curran, the new minister on the Executive's ministerial committee on drug misuse—in that the Social Justice Committee wants to push the balance further towards treatment and rehabilitation. I welcome the fact that the Executive is moving in the right direction, although I would like it to move further and faster.

Perhaps the most quoted statistic is the national treatment outcome study estimate that every £1 spent on treatment saves £3 on enforcement.

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way?

Mr Raffan: No. I have an awful lot to say and, sadly, I know the Tory approach by heart.

I am glad that Mr Aitken has moved his position. He made a very positive contribution to the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee report and I hope that he has some effect on Mr Gallie.

We need an integrated approach to addiction because many people are cross-addicted and alcohol is a gateway drug. In its response to the report, the Executive says that it is pursuing separate strategies to address drug and alcohol misuse, although it emphasises that those strategies should be linked. However, the approaches to drug and alcohol misuse should be more integrated. After all, health promotion and educational measures often take an holistic approach, covering both drugs and alcohol.

I do not see the need for both DATs—although

some of them are drug and alcohol action teams—and alcohol misuse co-ordinating committees. There should be an integrated approach. I hope that the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, who is presiding over the consultation on the national alcohol strategy, will take that point on board. I was recently on the Isle of Man, which has an integrated approach. I know that the Isle of Man is small, but we should seriously consider the policies being followed by other countries.

I welcome the extra funding from the Executive, but spending per head on tackling drug misuse is much higher than spending per head on tackling alcohol misuse. We should be grateful for that extra funding, but we must consider in the future how we get the balance right between spending to tackle drug and alcohol misuse.

I have three points on resources. First, as Fiona Hyslop said, we must ensure that the resources feed through to the front line. A letter on that point is being sent to the minister from the cross-party committee on drug misuse, of which I am convener. The minister would have received the letter by now but for the incompetence of the convener—it will reach him eventually.

Secondly, we need stability of funding, especially in the non-statutory, voluntary sector. We must have three-year funding to allow planning. Too many of those working in the voluntary sector spend too much of their time scraping around for money rather than doing the job for which they are qualified and experienced. Finally—and I am sure that the minister agrees—we must co-ordinate and monitor to avoid duplication and overlap.

The DATs are the vehicles for implementing the strategy on the ground. They bring together health boards, local authorities and the police in an integrated approach. There are a number of issues here. First, the DATs have developed strategies but they have not always brought money to the table and pooled resources for distribution. I pay tribute to Fife Council, which has brought resources to the local DAT for distribution. I think that that is what the Executive would like to happen; it is certainly what I would like to happen. All moneys—whether it is for the SIPs or the drugs challenge fund—should be routed through the DATs to ensure co-ordination, to avoid duplication and to focus rather than diffuse our efforts. Nearly all the 22 DATs are drug action teams; three or four are drug and alcohol action teams; and one is a SAT—a substance action team. As I have said, we should have uniformity of approach, without dictating to the local level. The minister and I disagree on that point, but I persist with it because I believe in it.

As Karen Whitefield said, the performance of the DATs varies. We must bring them all up to the

level of the best. Glasgow has the most integrated approach—it is the best example of working together. We must also ensure through effective drug forums that DATs are representative of those who work in the drugs field and use its services. The forums are a way of involving service users and their families and ensuring that DATs are representative and in touch with those who are using treatment and rehab facilities.

My colleague Ian Jenkins will say more on education and prevention than time restrictions allow me to. We must bring together teachers, drug specialists and alcohol workers to consider shared best practice. We must consider replicating organisations such as the Clued Up Drug Awareness Project in Kirkcaldy, which, when a problem—or a potential problem—is identified in a school, is invited in by teachers to speak to a group of children. The most effective approach is often outreach work on neutral territory. I cannot commend highly enough the work of organisations such as Off The Record in Stirling and The Corner in Dundee. I do not know whether the minister has visited them yet—I hope that he will have an opportunity to do so. As drop-in centres for the young, they are the way forward. There should be far more of them. They do marvellous work, as does Crew 2000 on the rave and club scene.

Mr Sheridan will be delighted that I will have to leave enforcement out of my speech. I had intended to make some positive points about it, but I am having a meeting with the minister soon, so I will convey them to him over our breakfast—he has early meetings.

We need a full range of treatments. The minister, in a characteristically robust interview on “Newsnight Scotland” last night, put his finger on it. I strongly agree with him. He dealt well with the simplistic approach of the programme. He talked about the need for different approaches for different people. I know that he and I have differed at times, but on this we agree: we need a full spectrum of treatments.

We need a three-pronged approach. First, we need to minimise sharing, by effective needle exchange. Secondly, we need substitute prescribing. I see the need for that and have become a convert to it. I agree with the minister’s robust response to the questions that were put to him last night. Substitute prescribing stabilises problem drug users and helps to make their lives less chaotic and more manageable, but it is not uniformly available from GPs. We must improve that situation.

The third prong is residential rehab detox facilities and day programmes, which are woefully inadequate. They are the weakest link. If the drug treatment and testing orders and the drug courts are to advance from pilot schemes to widespread

policy, we must get far more residential facilities and day programmes in place. That is important to ensure that people can get treatment when they need it. I can give the minister examples of drug misusers in my constituency whose parents had to fight for the funding to get them into treatment. We must ensure that investment in treatment is returned by building a network of halfway houses, so that those who go into treatment subsequently have a chance to build up clean time and avoid relapse.

One of the main issues identified by the report is that the availability of treatment varies enormously throughout the country. There is too much unevenness. In summary we must raise treatment up to the level of the best, remove the unevenness of services, focus resources—rather than diffusing them—to make an impact and co-ordinate efforts in the non-statutory and voluntary sector.

It is not a war. If it is a war, we have lost it.

We must bring into recovery as many problematic drug misusers as we can. That means bringing them into life in all its richness and variety, bringing them out of isolation and back to family, friendships and work, and helping them to realise their full potential as human beings. We must fight for those in need who have difficulty finding their own voices and for those who are on the margins, ostracised by society. We must be their voice if they cannot find their own.

10:47

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Lab)): I echo what has been said about Karen Whitefield’s introduction of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee report. She did well in the time available, touching on the committee’s main points and most of its recommendations. I thank the clerks and all those who were involved in giving evidence to the committee. Their service was a great help and was appreciated.

The committee’s inquiry into drug misuse in deprived communities offered all of us who were involved the opportunity to see at first hand how the problems associated with being hooked on drugs affect families and the wider community. Some members, including Keith Raffan and Bill Aitken, concluded that the drug addicts of today live in deprived communities and are, in many cases, from families who have had serious problems—perhaps alcohol related—in the past. They are among the most socially deprived people. Life on a low income stretches across generations of such families, which have often known nothing but unemployment. They have no hope and are easy targets for those in our society who profit from people’s misery and addiction.

The big guys—the big businesses that run the supply—live in expensive houses, drive expensive cars and walk out in their expensive designer clothes. The sooner those parasites who prey on our communities and keep people hooked so that they can peddle their drugs and addiction are off our streets, the sooner our communities will be able to recover.

Removing the big guys will not be done with a single approach; it will take the joined-up thinking that we talk about. I hope that that is demonstrated by the ministers who are present. It is not only the ministers with responsibility for justice, social justice, housing and health who will be involved—we must all work together on this.

While we were conducting the inquiry, I was most influenced by the fact that probably the single most important thing in all our lives is a roof over our heads. We all need somewhere that is dry and warm, where we can live comfortably and provide for our families. In too many of the areas that we were looking at, that most basic requirement was not available or was not acceptable. People are living in homes and communities that are crying out for regeneration and improvement. I hope that the Executive's proposals for tackling the problems of our most deprived areas will enable us to achieve that important aim.

The inquiry also brought to our attention the importance of having a job and having hope. Without a home, it is hard to get a job and it is hard to have hope. Without encouragement from people in the community, employers will not give a junkie the opportunity to get a job. That is why I am convinced that the methadone programme is one way of getting people off drugs. I admit that, when we started the inquiry, the jury was out as to whether methadone was a way forward. However, I am now absolutely convinced that it is. A report on television last night discussed the problems in Glasgow, but it should not be taken at face value. I would tell the people who made that programme to come and take a look at areas outwith the big cities, where people who go on methadone recover, get a job and are able to pull their life and that of their family together again.

10:52

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): In 1979, when the word "drugs" first cropped up in my area of Glasgow, the general view was that real men drank and had nothing to do with drugs. By 1989, when I left that area, I knew exactly where drugs were available. From the report's annexes on general acute hospital admissions, it is clear that a plague has spread across our land, although it is not restricted only to Scotland. I pay huge tribute to the people who work with those

who have succumbed to drugs. Community involvement is especially important and all sorts of organisations, such as the Inverclyde Forum About Drugs, work to collect statistics on drugs.

I want to touch on law enforcement, a topic that may excite Phil Gallie and Tommy Sheridan. As a head teacher, I was always aware of the balance that had to be struck between the general good of society as a whole and the individual cases that were causing difficulties. It is important that the exploiters be taken care of by law enforcement. Honest, decent people from certain areas have told me that they find it really offensive that dealers are out on bail and flaunting themselves around before they are finally dealt with in the courts. I heard Iain Gray talking about national prevalence statistics. The statistics on recidivism—on people who are cured and then drop back into a drug habit—might also be quite interesting.

I was totally unsurprised by the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's finding that there is more drug addiction in areas of deprivation. Iain Gray spoke of the need to build confidence and skills among people who are returning to the world after they have been rehabilitated from their drug addiction.

That raises questions, which Cathie Craigie touched on just a moment ago, about the kind of world to which they are returning. People must return to a society that encourages self-esteem in the individual. People with self-esteem, if they possibly can, will reject anything that will do them physical or mental harm. It is not easy to ensure that former drug users arrive in a society in which self-esteem is possible, and we have manifestly failed to do that in many instances.

How do we judge whether self-esteem is possible in a society? As Cathie Craigie quite rightly said, we could judge a society on the availability of good jobs, decent homes and people having a sufficient surplus of money after they have met their needs to make just a few little luxury choices. If we could do that for people, so that they felt that they were going into a society where they could have work and self-esteem, we could encourage a lot of people not to slide into drug addiction.

Whatever is done through education, prevention, enforcement and rehabilitation, all of which are vital, I believe that the best antidote is to create a society in which the kind of hopelessness that drives people to resort to drugs is eradicated completely.

10:55

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): The Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector

Committee's report is very good and the members of the committee who have spoken about it so far have spoken well. However, the report fails to make other recommendations that I believe are vital.

I welcome the clear and unequivocal message, central to the report, that drugs and problem drug use are integrally linked to poverty and deprivation. That message must be repeated over and over again as an antidote to the counterproductive and futile language of a war on drugs, which, thankfully, is not used in the report. Recognition that the tub-thumping populism of a war on drugs does nothing to address the problems is long overdue. The war that must be conducted in relation to problem drug misuse is a war on poverty. That is the war that will tackle problem drug misuse.

I hope that the committee members recognise that it is not good enough that a central allocation of some £34 billion of public money from Westminster is spent on national debt, when we have such high rates of poverty in Scotland and throughout the UK. I also hope that they recognise my regret that the new money that has been mentioned for rehabilitation is part and parcel of the local government settlement. The local government settlement for Glasgow was 0.5 per cent below the average settlement across Scotland. Glasgow is, unfortunately, the heroin capital not just of Britain, but of Europe. It is also the poverty capital of Europe, and those two features are no coincidence. It is not good enough that resources for treatment, and particularly for rehabilitation, are so ill skewed towards Glasgow, which deserves more resources because the problems are so much more concentrated there.

Iain Gray: We must distinguish between the resources for treatment, which go to the health board and which are not distributed on the GAE formula, and those for rehabilitation, which are distributed on the GAE formula because they are, quite properly, channelled through local government.

Tommy Sheridan: The crucial problem is that, under its GAE formula, the Executive expects Glasgow City Council to spend £26 million less on social work services than it is currently spending. Glasgow's services are completely overstretched, with a ballooning heroin abuse problem that the council simply cannot cope with. Unfortunately, the spending so far has failed to recognise that.

As well as a war on poverty, we need a war on hypocrisy about problem drug misuse. Keith Raffan made a vital point about alcohol. We have major problems in our society with problem drug misuse, but they are not all related to heroin. Last year in Scotland, there were 13,000 premature tobacco-related deaths, 1,000 premature alcohol-

related deaths and, tragically, 163 premature heroin-related deaths, according to the Registrar General for Scotland.

The point, and the reason that I asked Bill Aitken to admit that the Westminster strategy was wrong for all those years, is that according to the figures from the Registrar General for Scotland, in 1994 there were 52 deaths from heroin and in 1999 there were 163 deaths from heroin. That is a 200 per cent increase in premature deaths. The problem with Bill Aitken's strategy is that it failed. It led to more addicts, more deaths, more crime and more addiction.

That is why we must shift towards a change in our drugs laws. We must break the link between heroin supply and cannabis supply. Let us stop criminalising one in four of the Scottish population for using a drug that is no more harmful than tobacco or alcohol. Let us promote no drugs; let us promote alternative lifestyles.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Wind up, please.

Tommy Sheridan: We should promote sport and stop criminalising young people using cannabis; they are being victimised for a victimless crime. If we could unlink the supply of cannabis from that of heroin, we could isolate the heroin dealers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Sheridan, please close.

Tommy Sheridan: Finally, we should investigate what happens in Switzerland and the Netherlands, where addicts are now supplied by pharmaceutical heroin, in recognition of the fact that methadone is more addictive, more toxic and can be more damaging than pharmaceutical heroin. We must investigate other maintenance programmes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that, when they exceed their time, other members are deprived of time at the end of the debate. That is not helpful.

11:01

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I commend the work of the greater Glasgow drug action team as an example of effective local partnership that involves the full range of agencies. One of the reasons for the success of the DAT is that it has set clear objectives and has a specified action plan. Over the past three to four years, the DAT has had an impact in co-ordinating responses to the drug problems that we experience in greater Glasgow.

As a former member of Greater Glasgow Health Board, I was fortunate to see at first hand the effectiveness of the methadone substitution

programme in providing those addicted to heroin with a route out of the chaotic lifestyle that is characteristic of drug abusers and which is the main factor in so many drug-related deaths. We should commend the work of Dr Laurence Gruer and his colleagues, who are internationally recognised as being at the forefront of work on handling patients suffering as a result of drug misuse.

Like other members, I think that the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's report is highly commendable; a great deal of work has gone into it. I also commend the Executive's response, which was published in February. The Executive has, commendably, picked up many of the issues that were highlighted in the report and is moving to take action on them. That is to the credit of Iain Gray and his ministerial colleagues.

I will highlight one or two matters to which the Executive should pay specific attention. A point that I especially welcomed in the Executive's response was that it set targets for its drugs strategy, but the targets should be more tightly specified and clarified. For example, one of the targets is

"to reduce the proportion of young people under 25 who are offered illegal drugs significantly, and heroin by 2005".

I am not clear what that means. Clear, meaningful targets must be set.

Tommy Sheridan mentioned the signals that the minister sends by the heads under which money is allocated and spent. It has constantly been said that there must be a joined-up, integrated approach to drug problems; that must be clearly set out. Like Tommy Sheridan, I have concerns about the fact that rehabilitation money was allocated on a per-head basis, whereas other money, as Iain Gray rightly says, was allocated on the basis of need. It is hard to see the logic that underlies those financial allocations. There is a pattern but it is hard to see the logic. How we focus resources on drug problems needs better specification. Clearer signals are required.

Money should be pooled, not only at Scottish Executive level, but at local government level and health board level. We should be able to say to those organisations that they are going to pool their resources to provide a considered, long-term, integrated support package for key projects. One of the current problems is that many projects are underutilised or waste time in bidding for challenge funding; a co-ordinated response is required.

I have serious concerns about the failure of the published research agenda to examine adequately how the community agenda is to be taken forward. Several research projects on the community agenda are being funded, but—according to their

titles—few of them are saying whether the work done in Cranhill by Mothers Against Drugs or by other community projects is genuinely effective.

Much of the research agenda is being driven by professionals; I want it to be driven much more by communities. We do not need to know more about the prevalence of heroin—although it is an important issue, we already know a lot about it. We need to know more about how people in the community can work together to tackle drugs more effectively. We need to know more about how effectively different treatment patterns can be made to work. We should map out that research agenda.

I hope that the Executive will take notice of those slightly critical comments. They are intended to be constructive, because I think that the Executive is doing an excellent job on the issue.

11:06

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate, because the effect of drugs on our communities, deprived or affluent, affects every area that we represent, from inner cities to suburbs through to rural villages. The damage is all-pervasive, but today we are concentrating on deprived communities.

What struck me, on reading the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee report, was the familiarity of many of the comments and recommendations. Members who have spoken before me have highlighted—and those after me will continue to do so—their specific area of interest.

I will concentrate on a couple of matters, the first of which is prisoners. That is one of the key issues. We are all familiar with the merry-go-round that is a life tainted by drug addiction. Growing use leads to the growing need for money to finance the increased use, which leads to increased crime—with its attendant effect on communities that are full of victims of this fund-raising spree—and arrest, conviction and imprisonment.

The crux of my problem with our system is that I have grave concerns about prisoners who take up drug abuse in prison. I am sure that we all appreciate how difficult is the job of a prison officer, especially in light of the low morale and continuing lack of agreement on attendance patterns, but how can access to drugs within prisons be such that people without a history of drug use come out with a habit? Worryingly, they are learning from the worst possible teachers—prisoners. They have access to drugs at lower strength than that which is available on the streets of our towns and cities. Karen Whitefield hit on the problem in her opening remarks: access to

stronger, more potent drugs results in the death of newly released prisoners.

We must cut the amount of drugs in prisons, aim for drug-free status and, more important, do more to ensure that, on release, continuing support and rehabilitation are available.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Will Lyndsay McIntosh take an intervention?

Mrs McIntosh: I should love to do so, but my time is strictly limited and members have already encroached on the time available to us.

If we do not do something about the release system, more people will be queueing up for the tickets for the merry-go-round that I mentioned earlier.

Members have raised many points and I would love to comment on them all, but time is limited.

I will mention methadone and its effectiveness in the lives of chaotic drug users. Keith Raffan, in a speech that I commend as one of his best to date, described his conversion to being a supporter of methadone. He is right; it is effective for maintenance. However, it is not a cure.

Most members will be aware of the debate between the authorities in Glasgow and the treatment professionals, which the committee report picked up on. I have concerns about methadone prescribing; for example, I heard a radio report about a quantity of methadone being left on a bus to Balfron and it worries me that a youngster might have got hold of the substance. It is a killer in the wrong hands. As a result, I want the introduction of observed prescription.

We must consider other issues such as prevention, cure and—of course—enforcement; members will not be surprised that, as law and order spokesman, I raise that last issue. We must tackle the problem at its roots and stop drugs hitting the streets.

It would be of huge significance to the people of Scotland if there were a minister with the sole responsibility for that issue—although I know that Mr Gray's time might be limited in that job. However, my plea is motivated not by a desire to see the minister lose his job, but by the hope that, if he were made king of that issue, his covetous partners might not be so keen to look after their budgets.

11:11

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): During the campaign for a recent local by-election in my area, I found that the most frequently raised subject of concern for people was the effect of drugs and drug dealing on our local communities. As a result, I want to begin by welcoming the

debate and congratulating both the committee on its excellent report and Karen Whitefield on this morning's presentation. It is to the credit of the committee and the Parliament that such consideration has been given to an issue that touches every community in Scotland. Indeed, the report is so comprehensive that it will be very difficult to do justice to it in four minutes. I will therefore touch very briefly on two issues: the role of communities and the prevention of drug misuse.

It is no exaggeration to say that staying in an area where drug dealing is rife is a living nightmare. The report outlines—and Cathie Craigie highlighted—its effect on communities. A culture of fear and recrimination develops as dealers seek to protect lucrative financial enterprises; communities feel frustrated when the police have difficulty collecting hard evidence, even though everyone knows who the dealers are; and parents dread the prospect of children with nothing to do and nothing to look forward to being introduced to the drugs culture.

I am pleased to say that a change seems to be sweeping through Scotland as the Parliament and ordinary citizens stand together to say no to drug dealers in communities. However, we must also consider longer-term solutions. Yesterday, I asked a cross-section of agencies in my area to identify the action that would most improve the outlook in our community. The common thread that ran through their responses was that people wanted to find a way of positively and constructively engaging young people in meaningful activities in their own neighbourhoods. It makes sense; we all know that prevention is better than cure.

Police in my community are concerned about dealers targeting children and young teenagers with nothing to do, which is why we must consider young people's strategies to ensure better provision of recreational activities such as basketball, football, cycling and rounders—dare I even suggest roller hockey? The minister's commitment this morning to fund children's services is welcome.

Furthermore, we need to harness Scotland's existing talent, to provide positive role models for our young people. For example, in my town of Irvine, we have double world cycling champion Graeme Obree and Olympic gold medallist Stephanie Cook. We should use Scotland's success stories to harness our young people's energy in a positive way. Most of us would rather see our kids playing basketball and football and, by doing so, building the team spirit and self-esteem that Colin Campbell mentioned this morning. In that way, the older kids could look after the younger kids instead of both groups hanging about streets being targeted unscrupulously by unscrupulous people.

Almost 60 years ago, the social reformer Beveridge talked about the five great giants that stood in the way of social progress. He identified them as want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness, which today we would perhaps call poverty, ill health, lack of education, poor housing and unemployment. The issue of drugs is a sixth modern-day giant that stands in the way of progress in our communities and is inextricably linked to the other five. Joined-up working and an holistic approach has been rightly identified as the way forward. It seems particularly important to tackle what Beveridge described as “idleness”, or unemployment. The committee report quite rightly emphasises training and employment opportunities, and the minister this morning mentioned overcoming barriers to employment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the member to wind up, please.

Irene Oldfather: I could discuss many other issues today, but the Presiding Officer has asked me to wind up. We all agree that today we begin to face the huge task and challenge ahead of us.

11:16

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): As I joined the then Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee only in November, I did not take part in the inquiry. However, after seeing the sheer volume of evidence that the committee received, I must pay tribute to the committee’s hard work. Robert Brown said:

“From the papers that we have, I see that we expect to receive more than 80 written responses, which is a hell of a lot.”—[*Official Report, Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee*, 5 April 2000; c 983.]

Irene Oldfather is right to say that children should be allowed to play football. However, in the city of Glasgow, so many community centres are being closed down that children in deprived areas are not getting that opportunity. Perhaps the minister will pick up that point in his summing-up.

Drugs and deprivation are certainly linked; drugs are often said to be the scourge of society and addicts the lowest of the low. However, I could be called an addict, as I use two drugs: the only difference is that both drugs are legal—although it might be said that I sometimes abuse one of them. We must take the distinction between legal and illegal out of the debate.

As Cathie Craigie pointed out, we should be targeting dealers instead of addicts. In every community—particularly deprived ones—people want to know what the police are doing about catching drug dealers.

Tommy Sheridan: Does the member recognise that the police evidence to the committee is quite

clear on that issue? The most likely source of an individual’s first contact with drugs is friends or family. As a result, the idea that we can seize drugs through targeting certain individuals is wrong and we have to be careful that we do not misrepresent the situation.

Ms White: I take Tommy Sheridan’s point. I was involved in a project that took schoolchildren out to Bridge of Weir to educate them about drugs. The children were not told that some of the group were actors from the PACE Theatre Company and were taken in as they were encouraged and then threatened by those people to take drugs. When the children came out afterwards, they told the policemen and the rest of us present that they had been asked if they had wanted to take drugs. That great project helped with drugs education in most of the schools in the Renfrewshire and greater Strathclyde area.

Margaret Curran knows that I am always asking questions about social inclusion partnerships. The committee clearly states that SIP funding should be hypothecated for use in projects to counter local drug misuse. Perhaps the minister should find out whether SIP funding is getting to projects, because from what people in SIP areas have told me, I do not believe that it is.

The new futures fund was mentioned in relation to employment and other issues. However, the Executive’s response on the matter is rather disappointing. It says:

“The creation of jobs is ultimately a matter for public and private employers.”

We cannot just brush the matter aside in such a way; it is the Parliament’s duty to create jobs for our children.

Members have mentioned their experiences in the current drug wars—for example, Fiona Hyslop talked about the young woman in Fife—and the number of young people I see on the streets who are suffering through drugs makes me sad. Indeed, it makes me weep at times. However, it also makes me angry and more determined to do something about the problem. That is why I think the committee report is excellent. It is also very honest, and I ask the Executive to take on board the committee’s views. In some areas, we are dealing not only with first-generation drug users, but with second-generation drug users. We must act quickly.

11:20

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate and place on record my congratulations to the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee on its extensive report.

Drug misuse is seen by some as a health issue; others see it as a law and order issue. The Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's report quite rightly found that both views were incorrect. Research shows that misuse of drugs is prevalent across all strata of society. It has a disproportionately detrimental effect on our poorest communities, where it devastates everyone concerned: the users, their families and the wider community. It is therefore encouraging to see, through the presence today of the Deputy Minister for Social Justice, the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care and the Deputy Minister for Justice, that the Executive is adopting an holistic approach to tackling drug misuse.

Ayrshire and Arran was one of the first areas in Scotland to work with all statutory and voluntary organisations to combat drug misuse in a co-ordinated way and with appropriate funding. The approach did not just happen: it came about thanks to the determination of the professionals in the field—particularly Dr Charles Lind—who are to be congratulated on ensuring that the strategy for tackling drug misuse is very much on the agenda.

Ayrshire and Arran alcohol and drug action team is holding a seminar later today in my constituency, Kilmarnock and Loudoun, to reach decisions on how the recent funding allocations will deliver for the communities of Ayrshire and Arran, where drug misuse is a problem. The moneys allocated over the next three years are significant: Ayrshire and Arran Health Board has an allocation of £2,447,000 for treatment; and there is £1,494,000 for rehabilitation; £300,000 for community disposals; £1,436,000 for young people and families; and an extra £120,000 for social inclusion partnerships. That is a total of £5.79 million, which is a significant amount. However, as the minister said, it cannot stop there. We need to ensure the back-up to sustain the work. The next stage, in my view, must be to include the Employment Service in the work of the drug action teams. If we do that, the cycle of dependency and poverty will be broken.

Partnership will allow us to tackle the effects of drug misuse in our communities and to extend the inclusion of communities in the process. It is encouraging that the policy direction of the Executive is supported by the policy direction of the UK Government. Tomorrow, my colleague Des Browne's bill, to set up a register of those convicted of drug offences, will receive its second reading. It will ensure that everyone who has concerns about the funds of those convicted of drug offences can have an examination carried out, after which the Proceeds of Crime Act 1995 can take over. Time and again, communities express their views about drug dealers who are out on bail flaunting the moneys that they have received from drug dealing. The bill is supported

by the *Daily Record* and by the communities of Scotland.

No one service, group or Parliament can do it alone. Heroin dealers have no boundaries. Our commitment to tackling drug misuse can have no boundaries either. Together we can make the difference for our communities. I thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

11:24

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I agree strongly with Margaret Jamieson's call for an integrated and comprehensive approach to this pressing problem. Drug addiction is one of the most poignant issues that we face today. Having met parents who have lost children as a result of drug misuse, I am convinced that the subject should be on the conscience of every Scot. When I met the parents, they said that, although their children could not be brought back to life, they hoped that everything possible would be done to prevent other parents and their children from having to go through the same appalling ordeal.

We know that more and younger children are taking drugs more regularly. It is a worrying trend in Scotland and in other European countries. Often, the children become addicted and are easy prey for enticement into crime. The Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee has performed an invaluable service to the people by making some very important and significant recommendations in support of themes adopted by the Scotland Against Drugs campaign.

We require more cohesion within drug teams, as there is a danger that there could be too much unrelated action when joined-up action to combat the drug menace is required. That is particularly necessary in areas that need regeneration, so that the benefits of strengthening the communities are not lost, as recommendation 4 recognises. Recommendation 14 asks that there be a range of services, including family support groups, to support families and carers. Recommendation 15 asks that local authorities

"ensure that all schools place a high priority on drug misuse prevention and education".

Recommendation 1 calls for research to be prioritised. I whole-heartedly support that, as research reveals the facts and the truth undoubtedly assists in pointing the way to the most effective outcomes. In that connection, a source of grave concern is the number of young women who have committed suicide in prison. Great care should be taken to ensure that appropriate treatment and recovery programmes are in place during and after imprisonment, if

imprisonment is the decision of the courts. If young people are sent to prison, they should be weaned off drugs and not tempted by them. It follows then that recommendation 26 is spot on. It states:

“The provision of detoxification facilities linked to longer-term rehabilitation should be expanded across Scotland if the number of addicts becoming drug-free is to be substantially increased.”

When we attempt to understand the causes and consequences of drug addiction, it is important never to lose sight of the fact that every individual is responsible for their own actions. Everyone, regardless of their circumstances, has a choice. Our task is to ensure that, wherever possible and as often as possible, individuals make not just the wisest, but the correct choice. In other words, we must tackle the problem at the root—prevention is very much better than cure.

An example of preventive education can be found in the key drug initiative launched by Lothian and Borders police. Operation Foil established a four-pronged attack on drug misuse, which combined a drug harm reduction programme with education initiatives, and enforcement with positive sentencing policies. That led to the demise of heroin abuse in the Lothians in the 1980s and provides a useful prevention model.

Tommy Sheridan: On the Lothian and Borders programme, does the member agree that the incidence of AIDS had a substantial effect on the demise of heroin abuse in the Lothians and Borders at that time?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: AIDS was certainly a factor. I am happy to say that it has been dealt with creatively. I supported the creation of the first AIDS hospice in Edinburgh. There was tremendous resistance from local people to having the hospice next door. Having visited the hospice, I may say that it has been a complete success and that there were no problems at all once it was established.

I am not able to begin to say everything that I would like to say, as many more members want to speak. Margaret Curran should be singled out for congratulation as the convener who prepared the report. She now has the privilege of being able to respond to the report and to see it implemented. The report was done with the full support of Mr Bill Aitken and, indeed, all Conservative members. We wish the minister every success in implementing it.

There is a great deal more that I would like to say but, if I may, I will leave it for another occasion.

11:29

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I welcome the report and commend the committee for the

work that it has done. The report is an excellent starting point and it is incumbent on all MSPs to ensure that the recommendations in the report are acted on. I also welcome the extra resources that the Executive has devoted to beginning to tackle the problems of drug misuse.

Drug misuse is permeating every part of Scotland. In my constituency, there are large areas of rural deprivation. Former mining communities in my constituency suffer the additional problems of isolation and often have little access to some of the services that are available in cities.

One strand to the approach to dealing with drug misuse is education. In a former life, I was a community education worker and saw young people who were deprived by drug misuse and who saw no hope and no future. We must tackle the problems of those young people through education—not just through education about drugs, but through education as a key to employment and success and to a way out of the communities in which they find themselves. Education is a key to those young people’s future.

I welcome the joined-up approach that is being taken in Lanarkshire, where the drug action team is pulling together resources to produce a life-skills drug action pack that has become a valuable tool across the education field. The committee recommends that each local authority should have teachers who are trained to identify children at risk and are able to make links with the appropriate agencies. That is vital. Early intervention for such children will be a key to providing them with the support that they need. If that support is not provided, the early problems will quickly lead to disruption at school, truancy and wider problems.

I commend the peer education approaches. Peer pressure is often used to encourage young people into drug use. Peer education can be used to provide the support that keeps them out of drugs. It is a powerful tool.

One of the most important aspects of the inquiry was the fact that the committee was able to consult community groups that face the menace of drugs in their communities day in, day out. In many ways, those people are the real experts. They have signed up to the idea of the need for treatment, they appreciate the value that that can have for their children and the communities in which they live, and they recognise the value of education, but they have also said clearly that they want effective action to be taken against those who peddle drugs in their communities. Tommy Sheridan is right to say that we must wage a war on poverty, but I make no apology for saying that we must also wage a war on drugs in our communities. That is why I make no apology for saying that I support the intention of Des Browne’s

bill to place drug users on a register.

I also make no apology for saying that we should confiscate the assets of those who make money from drug dealing. If people make money from preying on the most vulnerable members of our society, the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament must ensure that the police are able to take effective action against them and that they are unable to enjoy their ill-gotten gains.

That is why I support the *Daily Record* march against drugs. The march will not rid communities of drugs but will show once and for all that people from all walks of life—rural and urban Scotland alike—are not prepared to sit back and accept that drug abuse and drug dealing are a part of Scottish life. I do not want my six-month-old son to grow up in a country in which drug abuse is accepted and riddles society. That is why, on 1 April, I and my family will be joining my constituents on a bus from Lanark to say that Scotland will once and for all stand up against drugs. I hope that other members will do likewise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I call Brian Adam, to be followed by Lloyd Quinan.

11:34

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Paragraph 36 of the report says that drug use has multiplied in the most disadvantaged areas of Scotland and that the fact that a substantial number of young fishermen in the affluent fishing communities of Fraserburgh and Peterhead are using heroin is an exception to the pattern. I wonder just how much longer those communities will continue to be affluent, given the problems that are being experienced by the fishing industry. If I heard correctly, a Labour member suggested, rather unfortunately, that the moneys being allocated to help the fishing communities should be redirected to help fight drug misuse. I think that that would be highly inappropriate.

Recommendation 36, the final recommendation, needs to be adopted. It suggests that a sensible, cross-cutting approach be taken. The Executive is taking such an approach by having a few ministers examine the issue across the board. Parliament has to find a mechanism to parallel that activity.

I want to talk about prevalence. I take exception to Des McNulty's comments because I think that we need to have more prevalence studies. The report highlights the differences that exist within areas such as deprived communities that appear to have a preponderance of the problems associated with drug misuse. However, the difference between areas is only hinted at. Finance to deal with the problems is being

allocated in a variety of ways.

I have been in correspondence with the health authorities and local authorities in the area I represent. They are concerned that money is not being allocated on the basis of need, as is suggested in recommendation 19 of the report, which says that the Executive should make further substantial additional investments.

The Executive is investing across the spectrum of drug misuse treatment and care services throughout Scotland. I commend that action, but treatment and services should be directed particularly towards the areas with the greatest need and where services are currently underdeveloped relative to need. I do not believe that we have firm information on where the areas of greatest need are. Certainly the allocation of funds in the north-east does not reflect the fact that that area has a greater need than others.

A letter that I have received from Aberdeen City Council says:

"You may be aware, however, that the mechanism for calculating much of this funding has been altered such that rather than population or numbers of clients/patients being the main criteria there has been a move to urban conurbation deprivation indicators",

and that they relate to the Arbutnott formula. I would have thought that the Arbutnott formula was wholly inappropriate in this circumstance and I look forward to the research that will give us better criteria on which to base funding allocations.

Iain Gray: It is not the Arbutnott formula that was used in the distribution of treatment resources, but the Arbutnott substance abuse formula, which is specific to the matter under discussion.

Brian Adam: It seems unusual, in that case, that Grampian received 6.5 per cent of the total when, on a population basis, it should have received 10 per cent. All the independently produced statistics suggest that Grampian has a greater problem with drug misuse than Scotland does in general. I am not suggesting that it has the greatest problem in the country, but it has one of the greatest problems. The formula must contain some inherent weakness if it does not take that into account.

Recommendation 26 of the report says:

"The provision of detoxification facilities linked to longer-term rehabilitation should be expanded across Scotland if the numbers of addicts becoming drug-free is to be substantially increased."

I have spoken to the minister and written to his predecessor and I am extremely concerned that the north-east does not have the kind of residential detoxification and rehabilitation facilities it needs. I hope that, if funds from the £100 million have not

yet been allocated, the minister will consider providing some for that particular part of the solution to the problem. I look forward to discussing the matter with the minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: When I said that Lloyd Quinan was to follow Brian Adam, Dr Simpson had briefly left the chamber, although he has been present during the debate. To keep balance, I will, with Lloyd Quinan's agreement, call Dr Simpson now, to be followed by Mr Quinan.

11:40

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): I want to concentrate on a couple of areas, but I will make an unusual statement to start: I agree with Lyndsay McIntosh that Keith Raffan's speech was one of the best in the debate so far. I will not reiterate the points that he made, but they are important. I think that the Executive is taking the point about co-ordination on board, but I believe that action on alcohol and drugs should be combined in drug and alcohol action teams, or DAATs, and that there should be single substance abuse teams.

I have spent some time dealing with the problem of drug misuse in my constituency, having had an interest in it for many years working in Cornton Vale women's prison. I attend most of the substance misuse forum meetings in my constituency and am impressed by what is beginning to happen as a result of the Executive's policy. As Des McNulty said, we need to feed that in to local communities and to get them engaged in the process. A lot of structures are in place now, but they are not yet producing the goods; we are not yet getting to the very root of the problem.

When I attended the Cowie forum last night, I was impressed to see it being attended by representatives of many agencies from that village, as well as by individuals. I was also impressed that the local police were represented. We were discussing the effect of reintroducing local policing into communities such as Cowie, Fallin, Clackmannan and parts of Alloa, where the presence of an identified local police officer has meant that the gathering of intelligence has improved immeasurably.

The statistics for Clackmannanshire show that arrests of drug dealers this year already exceed the figure for the whole of last year. I find that impressive. That is happening because communities in my constituency are beginning to feel that the police are with them and gathering intelligence. Despite problems with getting warrants because of the European convention on human rights and so on, their actions are really becoming effective. That is what Des McNulty was talking about in relation to communities.

Tommy Sheridan: Does the member share my disappointment and concern that 80 per cent of drugs convictions throughout Scotland last year related to the possession of cannabis?

Dr Simpson: I know Tommy Sheridan is almost obsessed with the cannabis issue. It is an important issue, but to an extent it is a distraction. I was talking about the dealers, not about possession.

The improvement that I have mentioned reflects communities' involvement and the involvement of young people in activities in their communities, which they organise themselves with community workers leading, but not undertaking, the activities. That has been very helpful.

Paragraphs 87 and 89 of the committee report deal with prisons. The Executive has funded pilot projects on diversion from prison, whereby the courts can take routes other than custodial sentences. That is highly commendable and I look forward to the evaluation of those projects. They are not research projects, but second-line pilots based on previous research, which I think was carried out in Plymouth.

It is vital that we have more than the prison strategy that has been announced for dealing with longer-term prisoners—those who have been in prison for six weeks, two months or more. They can undertake detoxification, and throughcare can be set up for them in an effective way. The prisoners about whom I am most concerned, and whose problems need to be addressed now, in the next phase of the strategy, are those who go in and out of prison on a revolving door—on very short-term sentences. It is impossible for the prisons to deal with their drugs misuse, because they cannot even start to detoxify them. All they can do is hold them over a period of time. We need to identify those people and ensure that they are picked up by the relevant community groups when they get out, if they are at the point in their addiction of acknowledging that they really have to do something about it.

In that context, putting women into jail, in particular, is not the answer. It is totally inappropriate. If 70 per cent of women prisoners are drug addicts, we are not treating the problem properly. We must take a radical shift in moving the strategy forward.

11:45

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): There is no question but that we have moved this debate on since the beginning of the Scottish Parliament. We must, together as a Parliament, commend the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's report and, to a point, the Executive's response, while recognising,

as many members have said, that this is simply the beginning of a long process.

It is important at this stage to remind ourselves of some of the evidence that we took. Some of the most moving evidence was from James Harrigan of the Glasgow Association of Family Support Groups. When asked what it was that we had to understand and, more important, who the Parliament had to make understand what the problem was about, Mr Harrigan replied:

"With the greatest respect, it is you—the people who make the policies and influence the public—who need to understand. Anybody who influences people with a description of how a drug addict performs and what drug addicts do in society needs to understand. We have to look at these boys and lassies as people, first and foremost.

In the dictionary, a junkie is something that is discarded. How would you like your son or daughter to be discarded by society? How would you like your son or daughter to be thrown in a skip, like an old chair? That is what people have to take into consideration. The boys and lassies out there do not want to be drug addicts. They have become drug addicts as a result of whatever has happened to them. They need society's help to try to get out of that system."—*[Official Report, Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, 31 May 2000; c 1145.]*

That was one of the most moving things we were told; the individual stories of people recovering were very moving. It was that statement, however, that affected most of us. It was about the understanding that we are not talking about people who are separate from our society. Everyone is somebody's daughter or son and we must recognise that when they have a problem it is our responsibility to deal with that problem.

We are advancing in dealing with the problems, but I urge again what I urged throughout the committee's inquiry: that the Parliament needs a committee to examine the overall problem of substance abuse. I have been happy to hear that support for that idea crosses all parties: Bill Aitken, Richard Simpson, Keith Raffan, Tommy Sheridan and Fiona Hyslop have all said that that is how we have to move forward; much of the evidence that we received said that that is how we have to move forward.

If we accept that individuals can take 10 to 12 years to get themselves from a chaotic lifestyle to full reintegration into society, surely we require a committee to run for that 12 years—or for 20 years, or for as long as we have this major social problem that impinges on so many areas and on so many budgets and which affects so many of our people in so many different ways.

The economic problem caused by the drugs situation is enormous. That was another area that I tried to address during the inquiry. As I have always said, if our communities are underpinned by a black economy, we must attack that economy

on a pound-for-pound basis. We must also recognise that the present drugs trade is firmly linked to the illicit alcohol trade, which provides another good reason for setting up a combined committee.

Let us understand that the drugs trade, in a broader, international sense, is part of the illicit alcohol trade, of the arms trade and of the trade in human beings. It funds paramilitary and terrorist organisations across Europe. We have to play our part in combating that. I believe that by setting up a committee in the Parliament to address the full range of problems of substance abuse, we can begin genuinely to get at the root of this social and economic problem.

11:49

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The Liberal Democrats welcome the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's report. We congratulate the members of that committee on it and welcome the constructive tone of this morning's debate. In particular, Karen Whitefield and Keith Raffan have outlined the extent of the problem.

Members have argued that alcohol and smoking are perhaps more dangerous and fully established problems, but there is a real sense that drugs misuse is seen as being of a different order, perhaps because of its association with criminality and violence. A genuine sense of alienation also goes along with drugs misuse. There are risks to children and such misuse represents a time bomb for the health service. There is also a sense of individuals having lost themselves.

Other members have said that the drugs problem is not found only in cities. It is as possible for a person to become lost to drugs in Kelso as it is in Castlemilk. From time to time I meet pupils whom I taught and knew as lively youngsters, but who have turned to drugs and lost themselves, their self-respect, their friends and their families. It is desperately sad.

The Liberal Democrats commend the important approach that lies behind the report and behind the Executive's programme—I think Iain Gray called it a complex and multi-layered solution. We commend it especially because it is an approach that is not based on punishment or rejection and it does not treat victims as pariahs. Rather, it tries to create an atmosphere of care and support. Most drug abusers are not criminals, but victims. They should be given a chance to draw themselves out of this slough of despond. [MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] We can target the professional dealers, but we must care for the victims. We must engage in prevention by trying to cut off supply where we can.

We must also engage in education; schools must have programmes of education about drugs. Their record is already good, but provision must be expanded. Schools must—many already do—use innovative ways of presenting information to youngsters, through drama, peer-group pressure, former pupils coming to speak to them and so on. Tablets of stone must not be handed down from the establishment of people who do not use drugs. We must instead use methods that are closer to the pupils, which they can understand and respond to.

We must, as Keith Raffan said, ensure that treatment and rehabilitation, including residential provision and halfway houses, are available throughout the country. We must give secure funding to voluntary sector organisations that are doing good work, such as Penumbra, which I have experience of in the Borders and which gives support and advice to youngsters. It offers counselling, assistance with housing and support when housing has been obtained and it helps people to integrate themselves into the community in which they have been placed.

I look forward to the coming together of the social inclusion partnership for young people in the Borders. That will provide a network structure. Sandra White said that SIPs have not quite got to grips with the problems yet, but the idea is right—we must bring the police, health services, social work services, drug action teams and the enterprise companies together. The Borders has a community plan, a children's services plan, a joint economic strategy, a joint health and social work strategy, a joint community care plan, a housing plan, a mental health plan and so on. We must draw all those elements together, so that when a person is drawn into the system there is a network that allows housing services, police and social work services to work together. The projects that the SIPs are putting forward are a move in the right direction.

Richard Simpson, Irene Oldfather and Des McNulty talked about the importance of communities. We must educate communities; we must draw them in and explain to people what we are trying to do. We need to understand and sympathise with members of communities who feel threatened by the anti-social element of drug abuse. We need to show sensitivity in housing allocation. Old folk in flats are sometimes surrounded by people who have been placed there to try to help them as sufferers or victims, but we are perhaps being insensitive about where those people are being placed, who their neighbours are and so on.

We must explain to people what projects are trying to do and how they are supposed to work. I agree—I think that it was Irene Oldfather who

mentioned this—that youngsters must be offered alternative activities. Education has a role to play in that. We must educate children not only to pass examinations, but to be self-reliant and to spend their time profitably and to benefit from books, films and other activities. Education is not just about passing examinations. It should be about making people able to find things to do that are not merely an attempt to escape from where they are.

Many members have said that the report is a positive start. Because of the way in which it is constituted, our Parliament can be closer to the problem. We have shown that we are closer to the problem and we can stay closer to it than can Westminster.

Members have spoken in detail about visits to community projects throughout Scotland. We must not just say, "Okay, we've had the debate. The report's good. It's done and dusted." The matter must not be forgotten; we must go forward in the spirit of working together that has been shown today. We must keep progress under critical supervision. We must examine what we have said we want to do and get on with working together for a better Scotland.

11:56

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I start by congratulating Karen Whitefield on the way in which she presented the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's report. Members have congratulated the committee on the report, but I also congratulate it on the wealth of evidence that is supplied in volume 2 of the report. There is much information there that many members could learn from in the months and years ahead.

Lyndsay McIntosh said that there is something familiar about the report. I agree. There is much in the Scottish Affairs Select Committee's report from May 1994 that aligns with the findings in the report that we are debating today. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton referred to the setting up of Scotland Against Drugs—which, I remind members, had all-party support—which was based in part on the findings of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee's report. That report had its uses and the report we are considering today certainly has its uses. Again, congratulations are due to everybody who was involved. The minister—Margaret Curran—who was so much involved at the beginning of the process will wind up the debate for the Executive.

If I am in any way disappointed about what has happened between when the select committee reported and now, it is to do with the remarkably consistent growth in the practice of taking drugs. Despite all sorts of efforts to curtail the problem, it has grown. That is something that the minister

must face up to and recognise when she deals with the matter.

Karen Whitefield referred to offenders returning to society and the danger of their slipping back into old ways. Offenders get back on to the heroin trail, take too much and we have another death statistic on our hands. Richard Simpson commented on the revolving-door problem of prisons That concerns me and it comes back to another matter Conservative members have talked about: the importance of sentences meaning what they say. It is not just about punishment—there must be a rehabilitation element. We need time for people to work in prisons to break drug misusers out of the moulds that they are in.

Robert Brown: Will Phil Gallie give way?

Phil Gallie: I am sorry, but I do not have time. [MEMBERS: "Give way."] Well, Keith Raffan would not give way to me and I felt rather disturbed about that.

Fiona Hyslop mentioned rehabilitation. If we examine the need for rehabilitation, it is clear that massive expense would be involved. Rehabilitation does not happen only while drug users are in prison. We must consider what happens when they get out. There is a need for on-going support and, perhaps, a need for a total break from their backgrounds. That is all-important. I think it was Tommy Sheridan who pointed out that drug culture begins in the home; it begins with friends and relatives and continues from there. We must break that mould when prisoners come back into society and use treatment centres.

As always, Iain Gray presented his case very well. He talked about the need for a co-ordinated approach across a number of ministries. I accept that. He talked about the Scottish Executive's paper on drugs. Perhaps one of the lessons that we have to take from it—Des McNulty made this point—is that we need to target more carefully. We have to narrow in from the current wide targets. We have to be extremely specific.

The committee report suggests that there should be some kind of on-going parliamentary commission, which I suppose would be made up of MSPs. That would be a very useful asset for ministers as they take this issue forward. There would be much value in another body of MSPs, or some of those who have gained knowledge of this subject, picking up on these matters, examining the detail and setting narrower targets.

I was concerned by Iain Gray's comment about young children. There is a real problem with children growing up in a family environment in which drugs are a major influence on the household. We have to look at that issue very carefully. Many people referred to rehab units; as

a pilot exercise, a unit to which a mother who is addicted could go with her children to receive support could be set up.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Phil Gallie: I will give way in a second.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are in your last minute.

Phil Gallie: I hope that Fiona Hyslop will forgive me if I continue.

Many good speeches have been made. I would have liked to answer many of them and I apologise to those members whose points I will not get round to.

Bill Aitken said that 4 per cent of the population of Glasgow are drug addicts. I picked up the evidence of Dr Lind from Ayrshire and Arran Primary Care NHS Trust. If 4 per cent of people in Glasgow are drug addicts, what is the problem like in villages such as Drongan, Cumnock and Rankinston? I recognise that there are real problems there. I would have liked to go on much longer, but if I do you will throw me out, Presiding Officer.

12:02

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, thank the committee for its inquiry and its excellent report. If any members had any doubt about the link between social deprivation and drug misuse, clearly the report will have dispelled it.

I will address an area that is of interest to me and which the report considered: the need to deal with the drugs problem in the Scottish Prison Service. I must first say that I am saddened to see that the Prison Service asked to give its evidence in private. The culture of secrecy that, for whatever reason, pervades the Prison Service must end. Everybody, including the Prison Service, must work to tackle the drugs problem. I hope that ministers will ask the Prison Service to change its attitude to these matters.

Mr Raffan: I wholly endorse what Michael Matheson says. It was completely unnecessary for the Prison Service to give its evidence in private. The Prison Service has also been reluctant to let people come to speak to the cross-party group on drug misuse. I had to ask the Minister for Justice to intervene to ensure that that happened. The culture of secrecy must end.

Michael Matheson: I fully support that view. I hope that the Deputy Minister for Justice will deliver that message to the Prison Service.

Some of the evidence that the Prison Service gave was excellent. That evidence showed the depth of the drugs problem in our prisons. Three

out of every four prisoners test positive for drugs when they enter prison. The Prison Service said that occasions on which 100 per cent of prisoners being received into prison test positive for drugs are not unusual. That illustrates the depth of the problem that the Prison Service faces and that we have to tackle.

The focus on the drugs problem in prisons tends to be on mainstream prisons, but we also have to consider the problems that occur in young offenders institutions such as HM Young Offenders Institution Polmont. On a recent visit to Polmont, I learned of a project to provide employment opportunities for young offenders, which was provided in co-ordination with the Falkirk Enterprise Action Trust project.

Unfortunately, the project ran out of money, and the Prison Service desperately needed to find £50,000 to keep the project going. That project would have enabled young offenders to develop opportunities for employment. It is essential that we bear in mind that we are not just locking up criminals who have a drugs problem; we are locking up people who often come from extremely difficult family circumstances and who have mental or physical health problems.

It is often said that our prisons reflect the whole of society, although the evidence that the committee received was clear: they are not necessarily representative of the whole of society; often they represent a section within society that is most deprived, for whatever reason.

The lifestyle that many of those prisoners lead prior to going into prison is chaotic. It is difficult to intervene in that lifestyle while they are in the community. To an extent, prison offers a good opportunity for intervention, so that their drugs problems can be dealt with. They are often caught in a vicious circle of crime and drugs—they commit crime only to feed their habit. As Keith Raffan said, just keeping a heroin habit going can cost £50 a day, which amounts to £18,000 a year.

The occasional foolhardy politician will say that the way to tackle Scotland's drugs problem is to cut off the supply. However, the issue is much more complex than that, and we must ensure that, in tackling the difficulties, our approach is balanced between enforcement, treatment and education.

Even if the prison-based services were given the necessary resources to tackle the problems that are encountered with prisoners, they would find themselves fire-fighting. When prisoners leave prison, often they will go back to the same chaotic lifestyle and environment that they were in prior to entering prison. The SPS evidence was quite clear: there is a need to ensure proper throughcare. Nick Royle summed up the position

when he stated:

"We can clean people up, we can dry them out, and we can prepare them to take advantage of the opportunities that are available to them. But we cannot give them a house, we cannot give them a job and we cannot give them a new life on the outside."

It is extremely difficult for young offenders institutions such as Polmont to work in a co-ordinated way with local agencies, because those institutions take young offenders from throughout Scotland. I hope that the minister will address that in his winding-up speech. Co-ordination among services is absolutely essential if we are to break the links with the serious drugs problem that Scotland has.

The report makes it clear that the serious drugs problem is predominantly based in the most disadvantaged communities in both urban and rural Scotland. I regret the comment that Margaret Jamieson made about taking money from the fishing budget to tackle the drugs problem. If we are to tackle the drugs problem, we must deal with the issues that the report highlights—boredom, frustration and lack of opportunity—in order to ensure that young people believe that they have opportunities in society.

As was highlighted on the BBC programme "Newsnight Scotland" last night—and the Deputy Minister for Justice will be aware of that, given that he participated in the programme—2.1 million daily doses of methadone are prescribed in Scotland a year, of which 1 million are prescribed in Glasgow. In Glasgow, 4,000 people are on the methadone programme, which is now full. No one is saying that methadone is the best way for every addict, but it has a clear and important role to play, as illustrated by the committee's report. It is essential that we ensure that those who go on to the methadone programme eventually come off methadone. There is no point getting people off heroin and on methadone and simply leaving them on methadone. We must have a clear exit strategy to get them off the programme. The system in Glasgow is not working, as it is not achieving that.

Tommy Sheridan: Will Michael Matheson give way?

Michael Matheson: I will take a brief intervention.

Tommy Sheridan: I will be brief.

Does Michael Matheson accept that the most important part of the methadone programme, or any other maintenance programme, is that of keeping addicts alive? I am worried that, if we try to get people off such a programme too quickly, they might lose their lives.

Michael Matheson: The committee report illustrates clearly that the methadone programme

has an important role to play in getting people off heroin. However, it is essential that we do not just put people on methadone for the rest of their lives, and it is clear that the methadone programme lacks the structure to get people off that drug. We must put in place an exit strategy to tackle that specific problem.

Many members have highlighted the need to ensure that we target resources at those areas that are in greatest need—again, that is clearly illustrated in the report. I welcome the minister's commitment to conducting further research, as that will ensure that the necessary statistical information is available to target resources properly.

I will close by adding my support for recommendation 36 of the report, which recommends getting a parliamentary committee together. It is incumbent upon our Parliament to do everything in its power to tackle the problem of drug abuse in Scotland. All the parties in the chamber believe that there is a need to achieve that. Will the minister take a lead on the issue? Will he convene a meeting where all the parties can get together to try to move the issue forward? I recognise that that matter is for the Parliament to decide, but I hope that the minister is willing to take a lead on that recommendation.

12:10

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): As a number of members have indicated, I was privileged to convene the committee that launched and conducted the inquiry. I thank those members for their gracious comments although, in saying that, I do not mean to sound self-congratulatory. I am sure that the other committee members also would not wish to do so. I thank them for the work that they put in.

I had a good opportunity to participate in the range of evidence that was presented to the committee. I will not take up time to repeat their comments, but I wish to thank the many people who, in giving evidence, talked about what were very personal experiences. A number of the parents who gave evidence had lost their children. That is very hard to talk about and we should pay proper respect to those who were willing to share their grief with us. By doing so, they helped us to develop an understanding of the problem. They are a credit to the country.

I argued very strongly for the report, which I think has made a significant contribution to the parliamentary process. Members might say that I am bound to say that, but I genuinely believe that to be the case. The report will help us to understand the key issues and to develop appropriate responses. The committee's intention

was to influence the Executive and, as members can see from its response, the committee report was indeed influential. As Iain Gray indicated, that can be seen particularly in the huge financial input that has been made and also in the way that the new drugs money will be spent.

In closing for the Executive, I wish to emphasise the key issues that were flagged up by the committee in the report. The most critical is the understanding that certain communities feel that they have been virtually abandoned because of drugs. Those communities feel virtually overwhelmed by the problem and many had the courage to talk about that.

The report shows that the problem is not only an urban phenomenon, as rural poverty also featured in evidence given to the committee. As many members have said, the problem is more widespread than the stereotypical image of urban squalor suggests. Critical to the emphasis of the report is the need to work with communities: those who have experienced the problem of drug addiction; the families of those drug addicts; and those on the receiving end of the problem who have a sense of being overwhelmed.

Fiona Hyslop: One of the areas that we have not covered so far is the evidence that we received on our visit to Dublin, where it was quite clear that there was an input at local and national level from people who had community experience. What steps is Margaret Curran taking, now that she is a minister, to ensure that Scotland has the same perspective?

Ms Curran: Indeed, that is an important point, which I am keen to pursue within the social justice portfolio. As Iain Gray said in his opening remarks, we intend to have a conference on the theme of community, which will look at that kind of issue. We want to ensure that community issues directly feed into all levels of decision making. I will pick up Fiona Hyslop's other points later on.

I hope that Lyndsay McIntosh was not suggesting that Malcolm Chisholm and I have no role to play in this area.

Mrs McIntosh: Not at all.

Ms Curran: I am sure that she did not.

I shall argue strongly for social justice to have an influence on drugs policy. I am glad to say that I have other ministers' support in ensuring that we see the broad issue around drugs. Drugs are not only a justice issue—that is well accepted by the Executive.

We recognise that many communities that are already struggling to cope with other social disadvantages need our urgent and sustained support. They need resources, which we have talked about a lot today. They need the

intervention of sensitive services that understand what it is like to experience the problem. Many local groups have pleaded with services to appreciate the circumstances in which they live. We need sensitive professionals to do that.

There also needs to be understanding. Too often communities have been characterised as unresponsive and interested only in enforcement, when that is categorically not the case. In my constituency, which includes the greater Easterhouse area and the Baillieston area, there are two active Mothers Against Drugs groups. They understand cause and effect. They understand the need to take responsibility for their own children as they go through these problems.

Mothers Against Drugs in Cranhill has been involved, working with the local social work department, in establishing the sophisticated new horizons project. Groups are not given credit often enough for that kind of work. They are strong on enforcement, and properly so. They talk the language of the war on drug dealers, which has been a feature of this morning's discussion. I strongly agree with what Karen Gillon said. She did not shirk from saying that we support the war on dealers.

I am happy to engage Mr Sheridan in socialist rhetoric. The cornerstone of what we do—and the cornerstone of my socialist beliefs—is the absolute commitment to resist vicious exploitation of the most vulnerable sections of society. In drug issues, we see the private market at its worst and private economic forces at their worst.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister therefore join me in condemning the licensed legal drug firms, such as those in the alcohol and tobacco industries, that target children to hook them on alcohol and that target children to hook them on tobacco? Let us take an even-handed approach: let us condemn the illegal drug dealers, but let us also condemn the legal drug dealers.

Ms Curran: As Tommy Sheridan knows, our Government is on record as saying that we should not target young people with alcohol or tobacco. However, I put it to him that we do not solve the problem of illegal drugs by softening our approach to them. It is Mr Sheridan who does not take an even-handed approach. We are trying to tackle the exploitation in the illegal drugs market.

Tommy Sheridan: Cannabis is not the problem.

Ms Curran: I have to tell Mr Sheridan that he is not listening to the ordinary people of Glasgow if he thinks that cannabis is not a problem. I will take Mr Sheridan to my constituency and show him the serious consequences of young people taking cannabis and then mixing it with other illegal drugs. Mothers Against Drugs will tell Mr Sheridan categorically, as they have told me, that the way

that cannabis is used on the streets in Glasgow leads to extremely risky behaviour, to very serious problems and to—

Tommy Sheridan: It is risky because it is illegal.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Mr Sheridan, you must not speak from a sedentary position. If you want to intervene, please stand up.

Ms Curran: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Tommy Sheridan *rose*—

Ms Curran: Oh come on, Tommy, let me get on. We have to understand that we will not solve the problem of illegal drug use simply by legalising some other drugs. As Tommy Sheridan knows, kids get cannabis from people who deal in other drugs.

Mr Sheridan said earlier that people get cannabis from small-scale users or from their family. If Tommy Sheridan has made any analysis at all of the economic conditions of our society, he will know that behind those small-scale drug users is a very sophisticated criminal market. We are trying to get at that sophisticated market. All Tommy Sheridan is trying to do is to regulate the private market. We are trying to deal with the criminal element behind it.

Tommy Sheridan *rose*—

Mr Raffan *rose*—

Ms Curran: Keith.

Mr Raffan: I want to support the minister on this point. She is making the point forcefully and she is absolutely correct. Cannabis, along with alcohol, is a gateway drug to the use of harder drugs. We must not tolerate that. As Richard Simpson rightly said, the discussion on cannabis is a distraction from the core problems that we have to deal with in treatment and rehabilitation. I only wish that the Scottish Socialist Party, instead of indulging in this kind of demagoguery, would concentrate on, and learn about, the main issues.

Ms Curran: I could not have put it better myself.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister take an intervention? She has mentioned my name several times.

Ms Curran: All right. One more.

Tommy Sheridan: Following that reference to demagoguery, would the minister care to reflect on the World Health Organisation's largest ever survey of teenagers—110,000 teenagers—which found that the greatest use of cannabis was in the countries with the most illiberal laws and that the lowest use of cannabis was in the countries that have decriminalised cannabis?

Ms Curran: It is time that Mr Sheridan listened

to the ordinary working-class people of Glasgow.

Tommy Sheridan: Rhetoric.

Ms Curran: It is not rhetoric. Everyone has condemned populism and rhetoric today. It is time to listen to the people who put us where we are today. They are telling us that we have to tackle drug dealing and that the way out of this problem is not to legalise more drugs but to tackle the vicious exploiters who ravage our communities and make hundreds of millions of pounds out of them.

Tommy Sheridan: The Tories said that 10 years ago.

Ms Curran: I have a lot of other comments to make and I want to move on, but there can be no doubt about the Executive's determination to work on that.

I wish to respond to a number of members' points. I have particular responsibility for the social inclusion programme. I am determined that we will monitor what the SIPs are doing. A number of members indicated what we are doing about peer education. A substantial raft of very sophisticated interventions are being used. Recently I was in East Ayrshire, where interesting drama and music workshop programmes are in place, as many speakers have mentioned. I am encouraged by how the SIPs have used their money, but we will continue to monitor them.

Getting to grips with the problem requires local action. I am encouraged by the co-operation between DATs and other key agencies. We in the Executive will be driving that. We will not be distracted from the wider debate, because we must focus on local delivery to ensure that people have sophisticated services.

The essence of what the Executive will be doing is providing resources, delivering sensitive professional services where they are needed, and tackling the drugs issue where it is appropriate, but doing so within an anti-poverty approach. In response to some of the points that were made about Glasgow, I remind members that it received £27 million from the better neighbourhoods fund because of the Executive's anti-poverty commitment. We will tackle poverty, and we are determined to tackle drugs as well.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: To wind up for the Social Justice Committee I call Robert Brown. If you could be done by 12.30, Mr Brown, that would be helpful.

12:21

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This has been an excellent debate. It is a little unfortunate that it has been sidetracked a little by Tommy Sheridan's

activities on the cannabis front. There is an issue to do with cannabis, but it is not the issue that should be addressed in this debate.

As one of the few remaining members of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee on the Social Justice Committee—the membership has been decimated by change and ministerial promotion—I have the job of winding up for the committee.

I begin by noting that a report such as this one, from a committee of the Scottish Parliament, has an authority far greater than the individual contributions to it, or hundreds of populist press releases by party spokespeople or, dare I say it, Government spokespeople. The committee heard evidence, visited projects throughout Scotland and talked to drug users, recovering addicts, drug workers and families. It has considered the report and the input of our expert advisers, and it has mulled over the issues at considerable length. It is a genuinely non-political report, and is the consensus view of the committee, as many people have said. While the report has been up for grabs in a political sense in today's debate, I am glad that most speakers have concentrated on the issues in it, rather than on whether it matches the manifesto commitments of any particular party.

Drug addiction is a tragic blot on Scotland and an horrific waste of young talent and opportunity. Solving it, or reducing its impact, is not susceptible, despite what Karen Gillon said, to the language of the war against crime. The language of zero tolerance is unhelpful in tackling a scourge that permeates our whole society, but particularly our deprived communities.

Let Parliament be clear about the focus of our concern: it is the unknown figure, possibly around 30,000 people, of hard-drug users who are responsible for a large proportion of property crime in Scotland to fund their habits. Our focus is not really the issue of so-called recreational drugs or cannabis. Anyone who has children in school, college or university knows about the wide availability of cannabis, and knows that in the normal situation—I am not talking about when it gets mixed in with chaotic drug users' lives—it does not destroy people's long-term futures. That that perception is accurate and widespread was shown by the public ridicule that beset Ann Widdecombe's short-lived proposal of zero tolerance for people who are caught in possession of cannabis—a proposal that even *The Daily Telegraph* branded as unworkable.

As a lawyer, I flatter myself that in the course of my career I have come across all sorts of people in all sorts of situations. I have met people whose families have broken up because of drug abuse. Since the 1980s, I have seen the explosion in the number of people who claim that drug use, rather

than alcohol use, is the cause of their criminal activity. However, I am bound to say, along with other committee members, that I was profoundly shocked to hear the real-life experiences of people who are involved in drugs: the technical descriptions of the lengths that young people will go to to get that extra kick; the life sentence of misery, persecution and isolation that is suffered by the families of abusers; the unnamed and often unknown deaths in the streets; and those deaths that occur after release from prison when, as a number of people have said, accidental overdoses result because tolerance levels have gone down during a period of relative abstinence in prison.

As many speakers said, the problem is complex. There is no one solution and no one quarter has a monopoly of wisdom. On behalf of the committee, I welcome the serious attention that the Scottish Executive has given our key conclusions, including those on the concentration of the impact of the hard-drug problem on deprived areas, the need to work with and through communities to make progress, the link—identified in recommendation 4—between the drug misuse strategy and regeneration, and the need to push the balance of investment towards treatment and rehabilitation, rather than the supply end. Even on an economic basis, there must be pause for thought about the implications, when it costs £7,000 for the most intensive treatment programme but £30,000 to keep an individual in prison.

I was struck by Lyndsay McIntosh's speech. She identified the implications of the need for more rehabilitation but failed to draw the conclusion that must be drawn. It is undesirable to put in prison excessive numbers of people whose primary problem is drug abuse. Putting people in prison is not the most effective way of dealing with the problem and does not solve it. I am glad that the Conservatives are beginning to recognise that.

Mrs McIntosh: We support other measures, including the drugs courts, which I think will tackle the problem of people who ought not to be in prison or who should have the opportunity to get out.

Robert Brown: I am grateful to Lyndsay McIntosh for that input. I detected a greater recognition of that point from the Conservatives today.

In what I think was one of the most brilliant speeches of the debate—it was peppered with insights—my colleague Keith Raffan called the patchy and inadequate facilities for detoxication and rehabilitation the weakest link, which they are. There is never enough resource for them. The £100 million of new resource to tackle drug misuse is welcome but, like the committee's report, it is but a beginning. It requires to be sustained. Successful projects must be backed for the long

term, not the short term.

Keith Raffan was also right in his speech to balance the drug issue with alcohol abuse, about which other speakers talked. Alcohol has been a long-standing spectre in Scotland. Nevertheless, the mechanisms of the DATs and the alcohol misuse co-ordinating groups should be integrated.

I will deal briefly with one or two points that were raised. Several speakers concentrated, rightly, on the methadone programme. Last night, "Newsnight Scotland" covered how that is tackled in a rather ill-balanced way. Methadone is a reasonably successful weapon in the armoury. As Tommy Sheridan said, it can prevent unnecessary deaths, deal to some extent with chaotic drug users and get people a little back on track.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: No, I do not have enough time.

Those effects of the programme are benefits that must be taken into account. However, we must balance them with the longer-term objective of trying to move people on once they are stabilised.

Members spoke about the inadequacy of statistics. To be frank, it would be extremely difficult to obtain reliable statistics about the issue in any circumstances.

Richard Simpson and others touched on the revolving door and the people who go in and out of facilities. We have seen a similar situation with homelessness, which we debated recently. We must do something about that. We must concentrate on successful projects, build on them and give them long-term funding.

I will touch briefly on the issue of victims. We have a populist tendency to say, "Let's get the Mr Bigs and sort out the drug dealers." That is understandable but, in practice, how many Mr Bigs reach court? It is the poor sods further down the line who deal drugs to fund their habits who end up in prison. Those people are often more to be pitied than condemned. As Ian Jenkins said, drug abusers are not criminals but victims.

As I said, there is no one solution to the problems. Jobs are part of the solution. I was struck by Cathie Craigie's linking jobs and hope. That connection is important. As Fiona Hyslop said, jobs are as much a part of the solution as is law enforcement. Irene Oldfather said that prevention is better than cure. She drew our attention to the essential point of how we prevent people from getting on to drugs.

We are dealing with a major and invidious social problem. It causes misery in an unimaginable degree to individuals, families and communities. It also produces inspiring stories of people who have

turned things round, of projects that and voluntary sector workers who, even operating in prisons, give hope to our society.

The committee's report points the way. The Executive's response is worth while and positive. I am sure that ministers will take on board the helpful contributions in the excellent debate.

I commend the committee's report to the Parliament.

Business Motions

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I understand that Tom McCabe wishes to move, without notice, that decision time today be moved to 5.15 pm.

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): I seek your permission to move a motion without notice, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am minded to accept the motion. Are we agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Mr McCabe: The motion is in line with standing orders. Moving decision time to 5.15 pm would allow time for a brief debate on the appointment of a Scottish minister.

I move,

That, under rule 11.2.4, Decision Time be taken at 5.15 pm.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of motion S1M-1777, in the name of Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Mr McCabe: The business motion is as outlined in today's business bulletin. The non-Executive debate for next week does not have a subject. It is slightly disappointing that the Parliament is not able to see the subject that it will debate next week, but I hope that the non-Executive parties will be able to provide future subjects in time for them to be printed in the business bulletin.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees:

(a) as a revision to the Business Motion agreed on 14 March 2001:

after "First Minister's Question Time", insert:

"3.30 pm First Minister's Motion to appoint a junior Scottish Minister"

and replace:

"3.30 pm Executive Debate on Rural Scotland"

with:

"*followed by* Executive Debate on Rural Scotland"

(b) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 28 March 2001

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Scottish National Party Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-1368 Pauline McNeill: Drug Assisted Sexual Assault

Thursday 29 March 2001

9.30 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 Debate on Education (Graduate Endowment and Student Support) (Scotland) (No. 2) Bill

followed by Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3.30 pm Executive Debate on Justice

followed by Executive Motion on the Armed Forces Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-1340 Mr Keith Harding: Homelessness in Fife

Wednesday 4 April 2001

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Executive Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 April 2001

9.30 am Executive Business

followed by Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3.30 pm Executive Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

and (c) that the Social Justice Committee's consideration of Stage 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Bill commences during the week beginning 2 April 2001 and is completed by the week beginning 14 May 2001 and that its consideration of Stage 2 of the Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Bill commences on 21 March 2001 and is completed by the week beginning 26 March 2001; and that the Health and Community Care Committee's consideration of Stage 2 of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Bill commences on 28 March 2001 and is completed by 16 May 2001.

Motion agreed to.

12:32

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): As members know by now, we are developing the happy custom of welcoming distinguished visitors to the chamber. There are two groups with us today. First, there is a delegation from the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, led by Dr Chyung Dai-Chul. We welcome the delegates. Secondly, we have the largest group of ambassadors that we have ever welcomed—14 members of the Council of Arab Ambassadors, led by their acting dean, His Excellency the Ambassador of Kuwait. [*Applause.*]

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Highlands and Islands Transport Authority

1. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made towards the establishment of a Highlands and Islands transport authority. (S1O-3163)

The Minister for Transport and Planning (Sarah Boyack): The Deloitte & Touche study published on 13 March concluded that there was insufficient support in the region for the establishment of a Highlands and Islands integrated transport authority at present. However, the Executive believes that an authority should remain a real option for the future. We will work with partner authorities to explore the matter further. In the meantime, we recognise that the status quo is no longer acceptable and have identified short-term actions to improve transport provision in the region.

Rhoda Grant: Does the minister agree that the transport problems of the Highlands and Islands can be addressed fully only through a transport authority, a policy that the Labour party has promoted for many years? I recently visited Shetland, where there are real concerns about whether there will be an authority. Will the minister take on board those concerns and ensure that the momentum for an authority is not lost? Will she bring an update report to the Parliament before the end of the year?

Sarah Boyack: I assure the member that we are very aware of the sensitivities in different parts of the Highlands and Islands. That is why I agreed with Shetland Islands Council's suggestion on exploring a strategic relationship with the future transport authority. All the authorities in the region want a full relationship in that regard. We need to

consider the exact details and scope of the authority's work and, as Rhoda Grant suggested, we must ensure that the momentum is kept up. I give the commitment that we will consider the issue further with a view to progressing it and we will bring a report to the Parliament for future consideration.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Does the minister recognise that the most recent report on this matter identified serious problems for transport in the Highlands and Islands, not least the fact that the area has 36 per cent of the trunk roads yet receives only 20 per cent of trunk road funding? Will she recognise the massive disappointment that many people in the Highlands and Islands feel about the fact that, despite the report's recognition that the way to the future and to better provision of services is through joined-up transport authorities, she remains unable in principle to give a commitment to set up those authorities?

Sarah Boyack: I very much disagree. The whole point of the survey was to bring together the interested parties. We are establishing the Highlands and Islands transport authority. That is a serious business and we need to do it properly. We need to ensure that we put in place the funding mechanisms and we need to consider the implications that an authority will have for the Executive, as we provide many of the lifeline services for people in the Highlands and Islands. That is why I gave a strong commitment, which was warmly received by the Highlands and Islands transport forum, to continue to work with other agencies. Together, we intend to move forward and to consider the real possibility of a transport authority for the Highlands and Islands.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): The minister will be aware of the great disappointment in Argyll and Bute and throughout the Highlands about the Deloitte & Touche report that was published a couple of weeks ago.

The Presiding Officer: A question, please.

George Lyon: I welcome the minister's commitment to make further progress.

The Presiding Officer: Question.

George Lyon: I hope that the minister is still aware of the bid by all the agencies in Oban for a prospective Highlands and Islands transport authority to be located there. I hope that she will keep that in mind.

The Presiding Officer: I think that there was a question there somewhere.

Sarah Boyack: I think that the question was on whether I was aware that people in Oban are keen for the town to be the future location of such an authority. I am happy to inform the member that I

am well aware of the case, which was put to me strongly when I visited Oban recently. I am also aware of the keen interest that has been expressed in Inverness and Stornoway—

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): And Wick.

Sarah Boyack:—and now Wick.

As we get closer to the creation of such an authority, we will focus on the details, on the scope of the authority and on funding issues. The authority's location is one of the key issues for us to examine.

Foot-and-mouth Disease (Rural Businesses)

2. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what specific steps it is considering that will help tourism and rural businesses affected by the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. (S10-3154)

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Ms Wendy Alexander): We are working with the public agencies and with colleagues in UK Government departments to identify urgently what measures need to be put in place. Those measures include targeted marketing campaigns by visitscotland both in the UK and overseas. UK ministers have directed the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise to take a very sympathetic approach to businesses of all sorts that are experiencing financial problems, and to show maximum flexibility in the deferment of payment of taxes and national insurance contributions. The Department of Social Security is, likewise, showing maximum flexibility in relation to jobseekers allowance.

In Scotland—through the enterprise network—a phone line has been set up for businesses in the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area. We hope to extend that throughout Scotland and specialist advice is being made available on cash-flow planning, renegotiation of payments and restructuring of businesses. I do not wish to pre-empt any of the further measures that will be touched on in this afternoon's debate.

Fergus Ewing: Although I am grateful for that answer, is the minister aware of the depths of the financial crisis that faces businesses in Dumfries and, increasingly, in other parts of Scotland, such as Lochaber and Badenoch and Strathspey, where businesses face bankruptcy and financial ruin? Does she agree that the package that she has announced—although it was long—contains no specific pledge of any money whatever? Will she please think again on the basis that the package is, quite simply, inadequate?

Ms Alexander: I gave a commitment to a specialist tourism recovery plan that would make

specific provision for Dumfries and Galloway, which has been so seriously affected by recent events. My colleague Ross Finnie—who is leading on our behalf the efforts that are being made—has put in place the economic impact assessment working group, which is working daily on the impact that the crisis is having in rural Scotland. A number of ministers have visited Dumfries and Galloway and I will visit the area in the next few days to see how the situation is developing. There is a huge amount of activity going on and we look for the support of Opposition parties in dealing with this unprecedented crisis in rural Scotland.

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): Further to the answer that the minister gave to Fergus Ewing, will she say what resources—additional to current resources—she has given to the local enterprise companies? What resources has she given to the area tourist boards to assist businesses to get out of the mess that they are in?

Ms Alexander: I talked about the crucial first steps that have been taken on the deferment of tax payments. On the additional resources that will be required through the enterprise network and visitScotland, the candid answer is that it is not possible to specify at this stage the extent of the additional resources that will become necessary as the crisis unfolds. I can give an assurance on behalf of the enterprise networks that they are committed to giving extra resources to the areas that are worst affected. The Scottish Executive is also committed to providing additional resources to visitScotland. Those resources will be targeted particularly at the recovery plan that will be needed.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Will the minister advise me whether the Scottish Executive or the UK Government have examined the possibility of lottery funding being used for short-term assistance to visitor attractions that might close permanently if they are not given assistance soon?

Ms Alexander: As part of the totality of the recovery plan that will be needed for the tourism industry, we are looking at every possible source for the finance that will be necessary. That will perhaps include looking at lottery funding.

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): The minister has given a full and fair account of the measures that are being proposed and I endorse much of what she has said. In view of the losses that are being incurred throughout the country by tourism-related industries—about which we have heard quite a bit—does the Scottish Executive have any plans to allocate additional funding to the promotion of tourism in the Highlands, and particularly in the Borders?

Ms Alexander: There is no doubt that the recovery plan that will be needed and that will have additional resources associated with it will need to be targeted at the areas that are worst affected by the current crisis.

Local Authority Staff (Pensions)

3. Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether council employees transferring from Argyll and Bute and Highland Councils to BEAR Scotland Ltd will receive pension benefits comparable to those that they held with the councils. (S1O-3171)

The Minister for Transport and Planning (Sarah Boyack): As the First Minister said on 15 March in response to Bruce Crawford,

“The new contracts do not contain any conditions relating to pensions to be paid to employees transferring under TUPE.

TUPE does not cover occupational pensions.”—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 15 March 2001; Vol 11, p 194.]

Mr McGrigor: I thank the minister for her reply but ask why she has refused to reply to the numerous letters on this subject that she has received from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities transport spokesman and the convener of the Highland Council. Why did the Scottish Executive not follow the UK Cabinet Office guidelines, which state that when contracts are transferred pensions should be “broadly comparable”? Why did the Executive not place an obligation on BEAR to provide comparable pensions for loyal council workers who have spent their lives making our roads safe?

Sarah Boyack: It is important to say that I have received a number of representations on this issue, not just from COSLA but from the trade unions that are involved in the transfers. I have given a commitment to look at the issue carefully and explore our legal entitlements and obligations. I am actively considering the issue and will respond to members and the outside representations that I have received once we have a final answer.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Jamie McGrigor referred to the Cabinet Office guidelines. Is the minister aware of what paragraph 14 of annexe 4 of the guidelines states? It says:

“The guiding principle should be that the new employer offers transferring staff membership of a pension scheme which though not identical is ‘broadly comparable’ to the public service pension scheme which they are leaving.”

Is she aware of the announcement by Jack McConnell on 14 June 1999 in which he gave similar assurances on contract issues? Why were the guidelines not incorporated into the contracts?

Why has the Executive failed to protect the pension rights of employees who have given so many years of sterling service? Why has the Government let them down? The minister should answer the question.

Sarah Boyack: As Bruce Crawford well knows from his previous career in Perth and Kinross Council, dealing with employment issues and legal provisions is complex, and we have to act within the law. The Cabinet Office statement of practice does not explicitly address the circumstances that apply in this case, which are that the contracting authority—the Executive—did not seek to transfer any of its staff to a new employer and that staff transfers were not involved when the contracts were first placed. I was advised that, for that reason, there were legal and practical difficulties in imposing the contract conditions to which the member refers. The legacy of the drafting of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations is that pensions are not covered by the regulation. That is a matter of regret to many of us, but that is the statutory position.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): Has the minister received any feedback from local authorities on whether local authority road staff are likely to be made redundant following the issue of the roads maintenance contracts?

Sarah Boyack: We are not yet in a position to say how many people will transfer under TUPE and how many may be made redundant. The early indication is that the number of redundancies is not likely to approach the figure of 3,500 that was mentioned in the chamber. Of course, any redundancies would be a matter of regret.

The Presiding Officer: I have a feeling that that question and answer were out of order, but never mind.

Higher Education (Funding)

4. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what response it has made to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council consultation paper on teaching funding, in particular in relation to the impact of SHEFC's proposals on the funding of higher education art, design and architecture courses. (S10-3180)

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Ms Wendy Alexander): The current consultation is a matter for the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the sector. However, we will want to assure ourselves that the final proposals minimise disruption in the sector and deliver the Scottish Executive's priorities.

Pauline McNeill: The minister will be aware that Glasgow School of Art, in my constituency, has an international reputation, which may be at stake if

its assumption is correct that the proposals would mean a reduction of 14 per cent in teaching grant. Although I welcome some of the changes, such as those relating to premium funding, which will increase the number of disabled students, I remain concerned about the impact on Glasgow School of Art. What measures does the Executive propose to take to address those primary concerns?

Ms Alexander: In recognition of the fact that changes could have a particular impact on small institutions, I am delighted to confirm that, at SHEFC's meeting in March, the council agreed to designate both Glasgow School of Art and Edinburgh College of Art as small specialist institutions. Therefore, those institutions will be eligible for additional funding that might be required to recognise their situation. That is consistent with efficient management.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): The minister will be aware of the evidence taken by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee yesterday on the SHEFC review of teaching and research funding. Does she share the concern expressed by Universities Scotland that the proposals are not based on evidence? Does she accept as significant the opinion offered by Universities Scotland that implementation of the proposals should be deferred until full consideration can be given to them and consultation conducted on them, given that the deadline is 31 March?

Ms Alexander: I am hopeful that we can make progress and reach agreement. Therefore, I am pleased to note that SHEFC and Universities Scotland have agreed to hold joint meetings to discuss the way forward and to consider the follow-up to the consultation. I have no doubt that some of the general anxieties that surround this issue will be alleviated by SHEFC's announcement today of the best settlement for almost 20 years for the funding of universities in Scotland.

Employment Opportunities (Women)

5. Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it plans to take to improve employment opportunities for women in the light of the gender differences highlighted in the Equal Opportunities Commission report, "Just Pay: Making Work Pay for Women". (S10-3150)

The Minister for Social Justice (Jackie Baillie): With a range of key partners, the Scottish Executive launched its close the gap initiative on 8 March. That initiative aims to raise awareness of the pay gap between men and women and to promote good practice to address that issue.

Elaine Thomson: Is the minister aware that

Aberdeen has the widest gender pay gap in Europe, at about 31 per cent? It is likely that the gap is partly due to the concentration in the oil industry of engineering and technical jobs, which, traditionally, few women have taken up. Does she agree that much more needs to be done to break down job segregation on the ground of gender, which will involve a lot of work with industry and schools?

Jackie Baillie: I find it hard to disagree with anything that Elaine Thomson said. We are aware of the geographical and sectoral variations in the gender pay gap. She is right to highlight the specific problems in Aberdeen. We must widen employment opportunities for women, and I am keen to take her comments on board. I should point out that Scottish Enterprise Grampian will launch its women into the network programme on 18 April.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Does the minister agree that one problem is that women are not encouraged to take up careers that are not thought of as being for women, in areas such as science, technology and engineering? The oil industry is short of properly trained people and, unless we encourage women into engineering, we will create problems for ourselves in the future.

I am not sure whether I asked a question.

Jackie Baillie: I will take it that Maureen Macmillan asked a question.

The Presiding Officer: There was a question at the beginning.

Jackie Baillie: We must challenge the stereotyping of jobs, and our support for leardirect Scotland and careers Scotland will widen opportunities and choice for women.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that the standing orders require questions, not statements.

Foot-and-mouth Disease (Disease Surveillance)

6. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to review disease surveillance arrangements in Scotland in the light of the current outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. (S10-3164)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): A thorough review of all aspects of the outbreak will be undertaken once the disease has been eliminated.

Mr Stone: The minister will be aware that, last night, Professor Anderson, who is an eminent adviser to the Government on foot-and-mouth

disease, linked the present epidemic to the rundown by successive Governments of veterinarians, veterinary laboratories and veterinary services. Professor Anderson said:

"If we don't put enough public resources into surveillance, both in the veterinary context and the human context, then we must be prepared to pay the consequences when we do have a crisis."

Does the minister agree that all of us—I include the Scottish Executive—must put the maximum pressure on the Scottish Agricultural College to keep the Thurso veterinary centre open?

Ross Finnie: That was a neat way of linking two quite unrelated subjects.

I will deal seriously with Jamie Stone's first point. The epidemiologist who was quoted is very distinguished, and I am certainly not going to argue with him. However, on the subject of foot-and-mouth disease alone, we must be clear about the starting point. We must establish not only the distribution sources of the disease, which are now well known, but the source of the infection. We do not have that information at present and we need all of it before we embark on determining what regulations will be required in the future. That might call for disease surveillance—indeed, we have an open mind on the matter.

The future of the Thurso veterinary centre is a matter for the Scottish Agricultural College. The state veterinary service assures me that it is providing the minimum surveillance as required by statute.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): I recognise the need for surveillance to stop the spread of foot-and-mouth disease, but is it absolutely necessary for private landowners to stop public access to land that may be hundreds of miles away from the nearest outbreak? Public bodies such as the Forestry Commission, Historic Scotland, the National Trust and British Waterways seem to be following suit. Some overseas tourists are afraid to come here because they perceive Scotland as akin almost to a leper colony. Will the Scottish Executive ensure that surveillance leads to the communication of adequate and accurate information to enable responsible access to the countryside, so that tourists are not unnecessarily deterred from coming to Scotland?

Ross Finnie: If the purpose of Dennis Canavan's question was to stop people being deterred, I have to say that his use of the words "leper colony" was not exactly helpful.

The issue is quite clear. The outbreak has been with us for only four weeks. I am in no doubt that the restriction-of-movement measures that were taken at the outset were absolutely essential. They have been a key factor in allowing us to determine

the nature and course of the disease. I agree with Dennis Canavan that there is a need for us to make a proportionate response, now that we have better established where we are. We issued guidelines on 7 March to try to stop unnecessary movement in the countryside. Since then, we have been in further discussions with the stakeholders. We are, as I speak, finalising an announcement that the Executive and the stakeholders will, I hope, be able to make tomorrow, which will bring greater clarity and avoid the unnecessary closure of those parts of the countryside that are not affected by the outbreak.

Local Government (Arm's-length Companies)

7. Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will issue guidance to local authorities on their continuing responsibility for, and relationships with, arm's-length companies that are wholly or partially owned by local authorities. (S10-3143)

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Local Government (Peter Peacock): We have no plans at present to add to the guidance on that subject, but we are consulting on local authority trading matters.

Ms MacDonald: I am glad to hear that consultation is taking place. Does the minister agree that new Labour Executives at national, UK and local government level have to accept ultimate responsibility for publicly owned assets or facilities? When he is in discussions with local authorities, will he consider whether more attention should be paid to how arm's-length companies work? He should look at the position in Edinburgh, which exemplifies the problem.

The Presiding Officer: You must ask a question.

Ms MacDonald: The senior councillor who is the executive member for recreation has said that he is unable to give any answers about what the arm's-length company Edinburgh Leisure does. The councillor who is the executive member for economic development has refused to discuss public appointments.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Ms MacDonald: Will the minister look at how the City of Edinburgh Council operates its arm's-length companies?

Peter Peacock: All local authorities receive guidance from the Accounts Commission for Scotland on how to regulate their relationship with arm's-length companies, trusts and other organisations that the local authorities have decided are best fitted to deliver their public services. Those matters are for councils, which are accountable to their local electorates and may

act within the powers that they have; they are not matters for the Parliament or for ministers. I am sorry that SNP members continually come to the chamber to undermine the authority of councils in their territory.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): What does the minister intend to do to improve the transparency of arm's-length companies? He is right in saying—

The Presiding Officer: Let us have a question.

Donald Gorrie: With due respect, the question is about the arm's-length companies and what the Executive intends to do about them.

The arm's-length companies are totally untransparent and are completely hidden. The minister can say, "It wisnae me," but Pontius Pilate was probably right to say, "It wisnae me."

The Presiding Officer: He may be, but you are not. I am sorry, Mr Gorrie, but you must stick to a question.

Donald Gorrie: What is the minister going to do to make the untransparent things transparent? That is a straight question.

The Presiding Officer: Absolutely.

Peter Peacock: As I indicated, local authorities receive guidance from the Accounts Commission on what the relationships ought to be and on what ought to govern them. The guidance specifically sets out what councils should consider in forming such relationships. However, it is ultimately for the councils themselves to decide how to handle those relationships; they are accountable to their electorates for those decisions.

Judiciary

8. Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will ensure that the judiciary is more representative of the communities it serves. (S10-3169)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): As I announced in a written answer to the Parliament on 14 March, we will set up an independent judicial appointments board that will recommend names to the First Minister for appointments of judges and sheriffs. Merit will be the criterion on which judges and sheriffs are appointed, but part of the purpose of the board—particularly the lay membership—will be to ensure that the people whom it recommends understand the communities that they serve.

Mr McMahon: Does the minister agree that the project of making the judiciary more representative of Scottish society cannot be a mere numbers game? Does he accept that appointments must

not be made as an exercise that results in unrepresentative tokenism? Does he accept that the process of change should not result in a broadening of the establishment at the expense of the depth of the representation within it?

Mr Wallace: I reaffirm that merit will be the overriding criterion. I do not want to pre-empt the work of the board, but I am aware of work in other jurisdictions where similar boards encourage applications from a wide range of people from within the legal profession. What the Executive is doing to widen access to higher education also ought to allow more people, in due course, to aspire to become judges and sheriffs.

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): Will an age limit be imposed on newly appointed judges? If so, what will that age limit be, given that justices of the peace who are more than 70 years of age are no longer allowed to preside in courts?

Mr Wallace: There is a statutory retirement age for judges. I do not want to fetter the board, but I will say that it might be odd to appoint someone with only a few months to go. However, I reassure Mr Young that there is a statutory retirement age for judges.

The Presiding Officer: Question 9 is from Cathy Jamieson.

John Young: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The minister did not answer the question.

The Presiding Officer: With respect, that is not a point of order. I call Cathy Jamieson.

John Young: But what is the age?

Unemployment (East Ayrshire)

9. Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will attempt to be more courteous.

To ask the Scottish Executive what actions are being taken to tackle above-average levels of unemployment in areas such as East Ayrshire. (S10-3176)

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Ms Wendy Alexander): The Scottish Executive is very conscious of the particular problems of areas such as East Ayrshire. In recognition of that, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire has been awarded an additional £4.7 million over the past two years to implement its Ayrshire strategy for jobs. East Ayrshire has also been designated as an action area for jobs. Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire is working in areas such as Muirkirk, Logan and Craigs, all of which, I believe, are in Cumnock in the member's constituency.

Cathy Jamieson: I welcome the overall drop in

unemployment and the actions that have been taken, but are there additional plans to ensure that the work that has been started in the areas that have suffered most in terms of job losses continues and that there are sustainable jobs for those vulnerable communities?

Ms Alexander: In the recent budget, it was announced that we will extend for a further three years the funding for the action areas for jobs that I have just mentioned. The policy is resulting in a fall in unemployment in East Ayrshire at three times the rate in the rest of Scotland.

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister explain why last year the Government removed access to regional selective assistance from much of the Cumnock and Doon Valley area of East Ayrshire, where economic activity rates are especially low? Will she revisit that perverse decision in light of the fact that the number of jobs in East Ayrshire has decreased by 18 per cent over the past decade?

Ms Alexander: I have just mentioned that unemployment in East Ayrshire is falling at three times the rate in the rest of Scotland. As for assisted area status, under the new European rules, the coverage for the rest of Scotland is something like 48 per cent—less than half—whereas I am happy to recognise that 80 per cent of the population of East Ayrshire is covered by access to assisted area status.

Water Rates

10. Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will review the decision to remove water rates relief for voluntary and charitable organisations. (S10-3151)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The Executive has no plans to review the decision made by the water authorities.

Richard Lochhead: Is the minister aware that the decision will cost Scotland's voluntary and charitable organisations tens of millions of pounds? Those organisations are campaigning to persuade the Scottish Executive to have a change of heart. Voluntary Service Aberdeen wrote to me last week saying that its bill will increase from £9,462 to £87,243 if the relief is removed, which is a 900 per cent increase.

The Presiding Officer: A question please, Mr Lochhead.

Richard Lochhead: That body runs schools for children who have special educational needs, residential homes and carer centres.

The Presiding Officer: We must have a question.

Richard Lochhead: Now that we seem to have a new minister for the water industry, will he adopt a new approach to the issue and revisit it as a matter of priority?

Ross Finnie: My difficulty, of which Mr Lochhead is aware, is that the water authorities are applying the law, which states that the water authorities shall endeavour to ensure

“that no undue preference is shown, and that there is no undue discrimination, in the fixing of ... charges”.

The member will also be aware that the authorities are now offering free metering to all affected organisations, many of which share buildings, to ensure that their bills are charged accurately.

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the minister clarify whether Sam Galbraith's recent promise to the Transport and the Environment Committee that the water authorities will provide free installation of meters to charities will be extended to other voluntary organisations? The minister has just said that free meters will be provided to all voluntary organisations. Some clarity is required. Will he make it clear whether that offer applies to organisations that are genuinely voluntary organisations but that are not necessarily registered charities?

Ross Finnie: As I understand it, the offer applies to all affected organisations.

Urban Regeneration

11. Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to regenerate urban Scotland. (S10-3148)

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): We have a wide range of programmes to regenerate urban areas. They include the social inclusion partnerships programme, the better neighbourhood services fund and the physical and economic regeneration activities carried out by agencies such as Scottish Homes and the Scottish Enterprise network.

Mr Gibson: Can the minister advise on the discussions that her department has recently been involved in regarding the establishment of a land renewal programme for Glasgow, which has been under consideration for five years, and whether we are any nearer to a positive decision?

In November, I asked the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning a question on this issue; it prompted the announcement of an additional £2 million to develop an industrial site in Glasgow. Will this question elicit a similar response?

Ms Curran: My predecessor, Wendy Alexander, would be more than happy to confirm that announcement. The interests of Glasgow are very much at the top of the agenda in our department. I

am happy to pursue these issues with Glasgow. Land issues are significant and we are in discussions with Glasgow about how we develop brown sites. We intend to take that seriously.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the participation of local people in SIPs is vital and that community development workers play a key role in that participation?

Ms Curran: Absolutely. As a former community development worker, I should declare an interest. They make a significant contribution to the development of local participation. At the heart of the SIP programme is a commitment to community participation. The voice of local people is crucial if we are to get right our policies on poverty and urban regeneration.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Following this morning's debate and the recommendations in the report on drug misuse in deprived communities produced by the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, which the minister convened, will the minister do her utmost to fulfil the recommendation that SIPs should work closely with drug action teams in respect of the resources that SIPs get specifically to tackle drug misuse?

Ms Curran: I am happy to give that commitment. I see the importance of close relationships between SIPs and DATs. We still want to encourage local activity on the part of SIPs, because they are beginning to engage in progressive work, much of which is still to be developed. There is a place for independent intervention on the part of SIPs, but partnership is the answer, and we need to encourage it.

Renewable Energy

12. Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure that Scotland benefits from the announcement on 6 March 2001 by the Prime Minister of additional funding for renewable energy projects and, in particular, whether it will set a higher target for the Scottish renewables obligation. (S10-3155)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison): The allocation of the extra £100 million for renewable energy that the Prime Minister announced will be the subject of a report, which is expected this autumn, by the UK Government's performance and innovation unit. I will stay in touch with the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry on the matter. The target for the renewables obligation was one of many issues that a recent consultation covered. I will make final decisions on the issues in the light of the responses that are received and an

announcement will be made in due course.

Nora Radcliffe: I thank the minister for his answer. Does he accept that a target of 18 per cent from renewables by 2010 is not very ambitious, given that when large hydro and other already approved schemes are taken out, the real increase is only about 5 per cent? Given that European assistance may be available to boost renewable energy—Mario Monti, the competition commissioner, has backed the principle of very generous terms for state aid—will the Executive pursue European Union assistance and a share of Mr Blair's £100 million with some vigour, to achieve more investment in renewable energy and to raise our target?

Mr Morrison: I acknowledge that a significant number of representations about the target have been made. A target of 18 per cent is exactly that. We may reach it, or we may exceed it. I will be happy to discuss what Nora Radcliffe said about Mario Monti with officials and to have further discussions with Nora Radcliffe.

Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): The extra money is welcome, but does the minister agree that we must continue to pursue the way in which the renovation of hydro is treated, as at present it attracts no resources from the SRO? Our existing hydro benefits the Scottish environment, but money and hydro will be lost as a result of its treatment under the new rules.

Mr Morrison: To be brief, I agree with everything Andy Kerr said.

Opencast Mines

13. Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to ensure public safety in and around existing and former opencast mines and quarries. (S1O-3149)

The Minister for Transport and Planning (Sarah Boyack): A robust planning policy framework and a range of other regulations govern operations in and around such sites.

Andrew Wilson: I am grateful for that answer. Will the minister undertake to investigate the serious concerns of residents from Croy and Kilsyth in my constituency, where houses and play parks near working and disused quarries go largely unprotected? [MEMBERS: "Constituency?"] Locals are worried about child safety near open drops of up to 100ft. Will the minister examine that issue and how those areas might be protected?

Sarah Boyack: I am aware that Cathie Craigie has a strong interest in that issue as the local constituency MSP. I give a commitment that the issue will be taken up by North Lanarkshire Council as part of the operation and management of local mines. As the member will be aware,

mines are dangerous places. That is why we have planning guidelines and health and safety regulations, which guide the operation and management of sites. If the member wants to write down a particular question, I will be happy to respond in writing.

St Vigean School

14. Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will make an announcement with regard to the possible closure of St Vigean school near Arbroath. (S1O-3162)

The Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (Nicol Stephen): The Scottish Executive will advise Angus Council of our decision on its closure proposal as soon as we have fully considered the proposal. At present, it is not possible to say when that might be. We appreciate that the authority, the parents and the pupils will be anxious to hear the outcome at the earliest date.

Alex Johnstone: If further considerations remain, will the minister undertake to ensure that the views of parents of pupils at that small local school will be given the utmost consideration before any formal decision is made?

Nicol Stephen: The views of parents will be a key consideration in our review of the closure proposal and the recommendations that we expect to receive soon from civil servants.

Single European Currency

15. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S1W-11460 by Susan Deacon on 6 December 2000, why guidance was given to health boards and trusts on how to plan for entry into a single European currency and which other public bodies have been given similar guidance. (S1O-3139)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): As part of the Government's prepare-and-decide policy, national health service Scotland bodies were asked to undertake a measure of pre-planning for possible UK entry to the single currency.

NHS Scotland bodies considered what services they might provide during a changeover and how they would convert their systems to the euro, and identified key planning activities. The exercise was a limited management pre-planning exercise that was carried out from within agreed running costs. Resources were not diverted from patient care. The exercise was similar to that undertaken by central Government in 1999.

Phil Gallie: As there is no intention at present to

join the euro, can the minister go a little bit further and detail the costs and man hours that were incurred?

Malcolm Chisholm: The people who were involved would have been finance and information technology staff. The amount of work that they did would have been just a few days. The cost for the whole of the United Kingdom for all services is £10 million, so, clearly, the cost to one service in Scotland is infinitesimal. It is sad that the Conservative party has nothing to say in the forthcoming general election, except a deplorable European policy. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

First Minister's Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Prime Minister (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to raise. (S1F-941)

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): With your forbearance, Sir David, I hope that the Parliament will acknowledge the contribution of Sam Galbraith to its work and to Scottish politics. [*Applause.*] It just remains for us to give Sam, his wife Nicola and his lovely girls our best wishes for the future.

In answer to John Swinney's question, I last met the Prime Minister on 2 March. We have no immediate plans to meet.

Mr Swinney: I associate the SNP with the First Minister's remarks on Sam Galbraith. Mr Galbraith has given a lot to the Scottish Parliament: he gave us a new word that begins with b and ends in s and sums up an awful lot of what we hear from the Scottish Executive from time to time.

On a more serious note, I reiterate the Opposition's strong support for the steps that the Executive has taken to eradicate foot-and-mouth disease in Scotland and for the work of the veterinary service and the Scottish Executive rural affairs department, led by Mr Finnie.

The outbreak is undoubtedly a major crisis. There are reports that in Dumfries and Galloway nine out of 10 small businesses may be facing bankruptcy. From experience in my own constituency, where—thankfully—there have been no outbreaks of the disease, I can tell the First Minister that there is an almost inexpressible anguish among those who are affected by the crisis.

Is the First Minister in a position to tell Parliament whether he supports in principle measures to compensate businesses for the losses that they will suffer as a consequence of foot-and-mouth disease?

The First Minister: I would like to associate myself with John Swinney's comments. It is quite clear that foot-and-mouth disease is having a devastating effect in Scotland; people in Dumfries and Galloway are experiencing some of the darkest times in recent memory. The Government is keen to eradicate the disease, provide immediate hardship relief and ensure the long-term recovery of rural areas. It would be fair to say that the Government, both in London and in Edinburgh, is considering all the aspects carefully.

I share the concern about tourism, for example. Tourism is a major revenue earner and the industry employs 180,000 people. The impact on tourism is one of the potentially devastating aspects of foot-and-mouth disease.

We are working on every front. Over the next few weeks, we hope to be able to develop consequential compensation. As colleagues are aware, such an initiative has never been implemented in the United Kingdom before. The Prime Minister has given the lead on that; he wants to consider every aspect and implication of foot-and-mouth disease to ensure that the Government in London and Edinburgh is not only listening, but responding.

Mr Swinney: Does the First Minister acknowledge that the announcements that have been made so far do not meet the growing demands and concerns in rural Scotland, particularly among tourism businesses, agricultural engineers and livestock hauliers, who have nothing to do in the current climate?

I have two suggestions for the First Minister. Will he argue with the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer for an amnesty on national insurance contributions from certain affected businesses in rural areas? Will he lead the Scottish Executive in developing a specific programme of rates relief for certain small businesses in rural Scotland?

The First Minister: On John Swinney's first comment, discussions are taking place about taxes, both in the reserved sense and in terms of the local relief over which we in Scotland have control. On John Swinney's second point, we are looking seriously at rates relief, because certain sizes of business will be disproportionately hit by what is happening. We want to ease that burden.

I know that, due to the urgency and immediacy of the situation, there are real pleas for help in our communities, especially in Dumfries and Galloway. Many suggestions, including those of John Swinney, are being considered seriously. Once we set in train some of the changes that we want to make, consequences will flow from those changes. To reassure John Swinney, the matters he raises are being carefully considered.

Mr Swinney: I am grateful to the First Minister, but I want to press him further. The day before the first announcement that a foot-and-mouth case had been confirmed in Scotland, Mr Finnie said to Parliament:

"If the situation remains the same for very much longer, naturally I will keep the issue of compensation in mind."—*[Official Report, 28 February 2001; Vol 11, c 11.]*

That was a month ago. Today, there is real hardship in the rural communities of Scotland and people need to have definitive answers about how

they will be saved from bankruptcy. When can people expect the Government to get those considerations out of being in mind, and into action, so that people have practical assistance from the Government to alleviate the enormous crisis in rural Scotland?

The First Minister: I share John Swinney's frustration and sense of urgency on the matter. Wendy Alexander has confirmed that an impact assessment is being carried out. We have had discussions, especially on tourism. It is clear that consequential issues flow from the effect of foot-and-mouth on farming. That will take time, but I can reassure the Parliament today that everything humanly possible is being done. The figure changes rapidly, but the most recent number of cases in Dumfries and Galloway is 62, and we are awaiting the Ministry of Defence's confirmation that the Army will help in the area. There is real immediacy and urgency. We want to pursue those hardship issues, as we are talking about livelihoods and futures. It is not about statistics—it is about real need.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): To ask the First Minister when the Scottish Executive's Cabinet will next meet and what issues will be discussed. (S1F-934)

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): The Scottish Executive's Cabinet will next meet on 27 March, when it will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

David McLetchie: I thank the First Minister for that. Before I move on, I join him and Mr Swinney in wishing Mr Galbraith a long and happy retirement from front-line politics in Scotland.

I am sure that when the Cabinet does meet, the foot-and-mouth outbreak will be discussed—as Mr Swinney indicated in his earlier discussion with the First Minister. I refer the First Minister to the fact that, earlier this week, the Minister for Rural Development, Mr Finnie, was quoted as saying:

"there can be absolutely no doubt that the level and degree of disruption in rural Scotland has been very extreme indeed."

The First Minister referred earlier to "devastating effects". I also refer the First Minister to a comment by Mr Russell Brown, the Labour MP for Dumfries, who was quoted last week as saying:

"If we are not on top of this in the next fortnight, I would be pressing for a delay in the election."

Bearing in mind those comments, the fact that we do not need to have a general election for another year and the fact that significant parts of the Scottish countryside are currently in grip of a foot-and-mouth crisis, does the First Minister, from

his perspective here in Scotland, have a view on the appropriateness of the timing of the election?

The First Minister: In one respect, I am in the fortunate position of having no control over when the general election takes place. That is very much a matter for the Prime Minister.

At the present time, we want to concentrate on the matter at hand: the crisis that John Swinney has alluded to and that David McLetchie has acknowledged. It is important that the Parliament sends a message to Scotland and the rest of the world that Scotland is not quarantined, Scotland is not a no-go area and, if care is taken, Scotland is open for business. We want to have unity of purpose around a message to the rest of the world that we want people to come to our country.

I end on a note that is not trivial or frivolous. The contribution that was made by the leader of the Conservatives in the United Kingdom was utterly remarkable. He suggested that we should cancel or postpone the election in some part of the country. I do not think that the Conservatives are totally unified, but we should be unified on the need to tackle the disease, eradicate it and then tackle its implications.

David McLetchie: Of course the First Minister is correct to say that it is a decision for the Prime Minister, but given the high regard that Mr Blair has for the First Minister, I am sure that he would welcome his advice. Mr Hague was referring to the cancellation of local elections in different parts of the country. We do not actually have a general election to cancel, as the First Minister knows. If we had local elections here in Scotland at that time, whether they should be held in Dumfries and Galloway would be a moot question. That is an important consideration.

The First Minister is right to say that there has been an impressive unity in this Parliament on foot-and-mouth, but the public believe that attention to that issue should be the top priority of Government. Does the First Minister think that it would be a pity if that unity was damaged by party interests being put before the interests of the country?

The First Minister: I feel a rich bit of irony circulating around the chamber. David McLetchie is in danger of turning a serious issue into a frivolous one, and I make that point with some caution. We need to concentrate on the issue in hand. We have no control over the timing of the general election. I believe, following my visit to Dumfries and Galloway last week, that what the people there want is a unified Parliament in Edinburgh that is doing everything possible. Of course there may be criticisms, but the people of Dumfries and Galloway want their problems solved and that is our first priority.

There is real concern about the future of all the communities in Dumfries and Galloway. I recommend, if they have not already done so, that party leaders go down there, discuss matters with the local community and find out how serious the situation is. The last thing on the minds of people in that area is doing anything other than tackling the real issues that face them. I hope that David McLetchie will accept that reply in the spirit in which it is intended.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Although it is absolutely right and proper that the First Minister is concerned about the compensation package for farms and the tourism industry, will he take up at his next Cabinet meeting the issue of compensation for miners and other workers who are awaiting compensation packages for asbestosis? There is a growing concern in industrial Scotland that miners and other industrial workers are being forgotten about.

The First Minister: The miners have certainly not been forgotten about. My father and grandfather were miners, so I am apprised of the conditions. There are people in my constituency and in those of other colleagues—*[Interruption.]* I think that we can do without exchanges on the back benches. A lot of members—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Let us hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: I have had miners come to my surgery who do not really have the energy to climb steps into a surgery because of the condition they are in. I have had discussions with the Secretary of State for Scotland and with the chancellor and I know that there is a real desire to move the compensation package on as quickly as possible. It was the Labour Government that decided that we were going to have compensation, and a substantial amount of money is available. Although that may be a reserved matter, Tommy Sheridan can be assured that this Parliament should again be united in doing most for those who have suffered in a very difficult industry for many years.

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I shall take the point of order at the end of question time, so as not to hold up questions.

Foot-and-mouth Disease

3. David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what progress has been made in implementing the proposals for the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease announced by the Minister for Rural Development on 15 March 2001. (S1F-938)

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): Disposing of dangerous contacts outwith the infected areas is proceeding well. Planning the major cull in the infected areas of Dumfriesshire and Galloway is proceeding. The cull will begin as soon as those involved in that major logistical exercise are ready to carry it out as quickly, humanely and efficiently as possible.

David Mundell: Nobody would dispute that that is a serious and major logistical exercise, but will the First Minister address a number of issues as a matter of urgency? The first concerns co-ordination between the Scottish Executive and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He will be aware that part of the 3km area in which sheep are to be slaughtered crosses the border. At the moment, there are no plans for the cull to go ahead on the other side of the border. It is frankly ridiculous for sheep to be slaughtered on one side of the border while others are present 100yd away.

Secondly, will the First Minister ensure that farmers who are affected by the crisis receive prompt and accurate information about what is going to happen? Nobody expects to be told the day on which the slaughter will take place on their farm, but they expect to be given an overall framework.

Finally, will the First Minister use his good offices to ensure that the military are brought in to do what they can?

The First Minister: I agree with the points that David Mundell has made.

I am advised that cross-border co-ordination is happening. I was impressed with Dumfries and Galloway Council and the co-ordination of the activities in the bunker—as they call it—which is superb. Morale and confidence are high in a difficult environment and co-ordination is being dealt with effectively. Relationships with MAFF are working well, not only at a strategic level but at a local level.

I also agree with David Mundell on giving information to farmers. An issue that was raised with us when we were down in Dumfries and Galloway was the matter of farmers, in an uncertain and unnerving world, not knowing precisely what was happening from day to day. We have tried to improve the flow of information. I sincerely hope that that will be effective in the very near future.

I said earlier that we expect the Ministry of Defence to announce around lunch time that it has acceded to our request for assistance from the Army to deal with the pre-emptive cull of livestock in the Dumfries area. Discussions with the Army were held in Dumfries yesterday. Army personnel will provide support for the planning, logistics and

management of the operation, thereby helping to relieve pressure on the state veterinary service. We are trying to move as quickly as we can on several fronts to satisfy the significant concerns that David Mundell has raised.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Does the First Minister accept that it is important for the cull to go ahead as quickly as possible to provide reassurance to farmers in my constituency whose farms border on Dumfries and Galloway, as they are concerned that the disease be contained within flocks? They are living on a knife edge; it would be appreciated if the cull were to proceed sooner rather than later.

Can the First Minister explain why it has taken 10 days for information to be passed to farmers in infected areas? That is not acceptable. We must speed up the information process so that farmers know exactly what is happening.

The First Minister: Karen Gillon has made two important points.

Tragically for Dumfries and Galloway, that is where the problem is in terms of confirmed cases of the disease, but the cull extends to sheep that are masking the disease and are in danger of spreading it. That is why there have been culls north of the industrial belt.

We are aware that information is crucial; we are ensuring that the information process is working. I say to the farmers, who I hope will be listening to this, that we are endeavouring to ensure that the burden that they are currently experiencing is eased as much as possible by the work of the Parliament and the Executive.

Fisheries (Discards)

4. Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's current position is in relation to the volume of juvenile haddock being discarded at sea. (S1F-946)

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): We are monitoring the position very closely. There have been isolated reports of high discard levels but not significantly above those experienced prior to the commencement of the cod recovery plan. We have also had reports from skippers that discards are in the region of 20 to 30 per cent. That is much lower than anticipated. Sea trials of the fishing gear adjustments proposed by the Executive are showing a marked reduction in discards with little loss of marketable fish. I again appeal to all fishermen to introduce those measures immediately.

Mr Salmond: Is the First Minister aware that on Tuesday his Government welcomed the publication of a European Commission green

paper on fisheries policy which on page 32 calls for a substantial increase in funding for temporary lay-up schemes? Given that some skippers in some areas are experiencing 90 per cent discards of young haddock, even employing the new technical measures; given that a minimum of 2 million small haddock have been discarded dead into the sea since their boats were forced back to sea; and given that the First Minister said last week that there was a "window of opportunity" on this matter, will he say whether that window includes a reconsideration of the policy advocated in the European Commission green paper, which his Government welcomed on Tuesday?

The First Minister: The Government's approach does not involve a reconsideration of the tie-up scheme. However, the Parliament has agreed to provide the fishermen with a window of opportunity to consider the £27 million package and to decide whether, with some flexibility, some of the fishermen's concerns can be dealt with effectively.

There are conflicting stories about the extent of discards. It would help a lot if Alex Salmond, the SNP and every member of the Parliament asked the fishermen to implement the technical conservation measures that are available immediately and will continue to be available until we work out some of the wider concerns with the £1 million that will be spent on technical considerations. It is important for the fishing fleet to acknowledge—as some of the fleet has—that the way forward is to implement those measures.

Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): Does the First Minister agree that it is essential for all parties to urge the fishing industry to implement the technical measures? Given that there have been conflicting reports about the continued use of fishing bags and that some fishermen are still not using square mesh nets properly, the fishing industry needs to get the message about using the technical measures effectively.

The First Minister: I agree. It is a pity to say what I have to say now, but the SNP has to take the politics out of the fishing issue. We could have unity of purpose, but one party in Scotland needs to decide not to conceive of this as a party political issue. The SNP might think that it is doing the fishermen a service; in fact, it is doing them a huge disservice.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): Does the First Minister accept that, by rebalancing and repackaging the overall amount of money, we could usefully fund the trialling of selective gear? Will he undertake to consider using the North Atlantic Fisheries College in Shetland, which has considerable expertise in this scientific area and is quite prepared to get on with this work? The college needs to have the bureaucratic blocks on

this matter lifted as soon as possible for the work to continue.

The First Minister: I assure Tavish Scott that such work needs to be undertaken. We want to work with scientific research bodies and the fishermen to ensure that we can proceed with the matters in question. With the current negotiations, the package will be rebalanced in the way that Tavish Scott mentioned. We will see what happens in those negotiations; and it is in the long term interests of the fishermen to do the same.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes question time.

Points of Order

15:33

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Mr Davidson, you had a point of order. Is it a real one?

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): I do not want to raise my point of order at this time. I will write to you about it.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Last Thursday, we had 14 points of order. When the Deputy Presiding Officers and I read them carefully, only one of them turned out to be genuine. The others take time out of the business of the chamber and are not fair to other members. If it is a genuine point of order, I will hear it.

Ms MacDonald: I believe that it is a genuine point of order.

Will you confirm that it is quite proper for the Parliament to express an opinion on matters that might be reserved to Westminster? This afternoon, the First Minister perhaps inadvertently gave the impression that although we have no control over the date of the general election, it is also not legitimate for us to express an opinion on it.

The Presiding Officer: You are technically correct. However, the date of an election is certainly a matter for the Prime Minister, not for this chamber.

Ministerial Appointment

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We come to the extra business on the business bulletin, which is a debate on motion S1M-1775, in the name of the First Minister, on the appointment of a junior minister.

15:34

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): I am pleased to move that Lewis Macdonald be appointed as a junior Scottish minister. The purpose of the motion in my name is to get Parliament's approval for the appointment, after which I will present Lewis Macdonald's name to Her Majesty the Queen.

I do not want to delay the chamber too long as an important debate is to follow. Lewis Macdonald is well known to members in all parts of the chamber, notably for his sure handling of the Holyrood progress group on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. His appointment is well deserved and I know that he will serve Scotland well. I hope that colleagues will support him this afternoon in the chamber.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that Lewis Macdonald be appointed as a junior Scottish Minister.

The Presiding Officer: Three members have asked to speak. In view of this morning's decision to postpone decision time by 15 minutes, I recommend a time limit of three minutes apiece.

15:35

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I rise to oppose, on behalf of the SNP, the motion in the name of the First Minister. Our opposition to the appointment of Lewis Macdonald as a junior minister for transport and planning has absolutely nothing to do with him as an individual; our opposition to his appointment will be our only opportunity to record the SNP's dissatisfaction with the First Minister's reshuffle package.

It must surely be unwise and inappropriate to add the environment portfolio to that of rural development. The Minister for Rural Development is in the midst of a crisis of quite extraordinary proportions. That is accepted by the Executive in the wording of its motion for this afternoon's debate on rural Scotland. Given that the Executive has acknowledged the crisis, and given that Ross Finnie has to deal with it, how can it be right that he is expected to absorb the environment portfolio into his already overburdened work load? How on earth can he be expected to deal with a brief as important as the environment while tackling the

foot-and-mouth crisis and the crisis in our fishing communities? The minister should be devoting all his time, energy and abilities to dealing with his current work load. Our farmers and fishermen expect nothing less.

The decision is also deeply concerning from an environmental perspective. There is a huge job to be done in the environment brief and there are many important negotiations to be undertaken in the European Community. The immediate issues, which any environment minister must get their teeth into, include the shocking record on recycling. The target that has been set is 25 per cent by 2000, yet 13 councils in Scotland are still at only 4 per cent. Scotland's record on CO₂ emissions is equally concerning. The latest figures show that Scotland's emissions are going up while England's go down. This week, we have had a report on the condition of our bathing waters and beaches, which shows that we are still one of the dirty men of Europe. Much work also needs to be done on organic waste and encouraging renewable resources.

The First Minister has received a letter from Scottish Environment LINK, which puts the matter quite succinctly. It highlights the negotiations that will be needed on the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy and continues:

"Furthermore, who will speak for Scotland in vital EU negotiations on issues such as the sixth Environmental Action Plan and lead Scotland's international effort on sustainable development?"

That deals with the question of the work load, but what about conflicts of interest? The rural affairs and environment briefs are littered with areas of potential conflict. Who will champion the environment in the Cabinet when it comes to issues relating to genetically modified crops and EC directives on pesticides? There are other areas where the conflicts are obvious.

The Herald perhaps summed up the situation best in its editorial yesterday. Ross Finnie's work load at this time of crisis cannot be added to. The environmental portfolio is important and a large amount of work needs to be undertaken. In addition, there is the enormous potential for areas of conflict. The First Minister said on 1 November 2000:

"Environment issues must and will be taken seriously—that department is a key part of the Administration." — [Official Report, 1 Nov 2000; Vol 8, c 1190.]

That has not happened on this occasion and we should oppose the motion.

15:38

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): Like Bruce Crawford, I will raise a number of points in relation to the appointment of Mr Macdonald and to the

change in ministerial responsibilities that has occurred as a result of Mr Galbraith's resignation.

First, Mr Macdonald's appointment gives a real lesson to ambitious members of the Labour and Liberal Democrat back benches, which is that the fast track to promotion in the Parliament is to become a member of the Holyrood progress group. Tavish Scott was in that role and was elevated, albeit for a short time. Now, we have Mr Macdonald.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It did not happen in my case.

David McLetchie: Mr Stone should not worry; Mr Lyon will edge him out shortly. I recommend to Mr McAveety that he should offer his services as a member of the Holyrood progress group, as one part of his political rehabilitation programme.

On a more serious level, I repeat that there should be a minister on the Holyrood progress group—I have urged the First Minister to do that on many occasions—so that there is direct ministerial responsibility for the expenditure of some £210 million of public money, a sum that is still rising inexorably. The First Minister paid tribute to Mr Macdonald's sure handling of the chairmanship of that group. I endorse that view and I think that he would best serve the country at present by remaining in that position when he takes on his new ministerial portfolio.

Why is the ministry of Sam Galbraith's talents, which the First Minister found it necessary to create barely five months ago, now being dismembered and having its portfolios scattered to the four winds? As Mr Crawford pointed out, rightly, the overburdened Mr Finnie has more than enough on his plate at the moment with foot-and-mouth disease and the fishing crisis, without being given further responsibilities.

What about the arts in Scotland? We are told that that well-known culture vulture, Allan Wilson, will report to the First Minister on the arts, culture and sport and will presumably advise him, on a weekly basis, on the filling out of his pools coupon.

I do not oppose the First Minister's motion, because I believe that the appointment of the ministerial team is the First Minister's prerogative and I do not question Mr Macdonald's fitness for the post. However, I repeat that the changes that have been forced upon the First Minister by the resignation have been a missed opportunity. I think that he will regret not taking advantage of the opportunity to cut his Government down to size and to focus ministers and portfolios more appropriately than he has done.

15:41

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Like the

previous speakers, I have no quarrel with the appointment of Lewis Macdonald to the post of junior Scottish minister. For the past two years, I have taken every opportunity to recommend that Sarah Boyack get a deputy minister. I am glad that she has got one at last and wish them both well in their jobs.

However, as the previous speakers said, we are dealing with a matter of principle. The reshuffle has not helped us in our attempt to serve Scotland's environment. I had a brief and equitable conversation with the First Minister earlier today and we reserved our positions on that point.

We have an important debate next and I want to be as brief as possible, so I will ensure that I stay within the three-minute time limit by reading the text of the letter that environmental organisations have sent to the First Minister and to which I know he has made a favourable response by inviting the groups to meet him. The letter reads:

"Dear First Minister,

We are writing to express our deep concern over the decision to dissolve the position of Minister for the Environment in the Scottish Executive. This leaves Scotland as possibly the only Western country without a dedicated Environment Minister and seems inconsistent with the commitment to put 'environmental sustainability' at the heart of Government policy. We cannot accept that distributing the existing portfolio throughout the cabinet will succeed in putting the environment firmly into all other portfolios. The practical consequences of this are demonstrated, for example, in Rural Affairs, where both Ministers are busy tackling agriculture and fisheries crises and EU negotiations on CAP and CFP reform. There appears to be no Cabinet champion to ensure that the environment and sustainable development are being progressed across government. We are also concerned that the initial momentum that was gained by Sam Galbraith's stewardship of the environment portfolio may be lost."

I agree especially with that part, as I felt that Sam Galbraith was getting a real grip of the portfolio. The letter continues:

"We would appreciate the opportunity to meet to discuss constructively these issues with you as soon as possible."

First, we had a minister with responsibility for transport and—as if in brackets—the environment. She did not have a deputy minister. Then, we had a minister with responsibility for culture and sport, and—as if in brackets—the environment. He took on the environmental part of his remit well. Now, we have the Minister for Rural Development, who is already up to his neck in work, and—as if in brackets—the environment. Other bits of the environment portfolio are distributed around.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Will Robin Harper give way?

The Presiding Officer: Mr Harper is past his time limit. He cannot give way.

Mr Rumbles *rose*—

The Presiding Officer: Order. He is past his time limit. Please wind up, Mr Harper.

Robin Harper: I see the logic in some of the changes in ministerial responsibility. Some of them might work well. However, on the environment, we still lack the driver in the middle. We lack the motivator; the person who will chair MOSS—the ministerial group on sustainability in Scotland; the person who will drive things forward for the environment in Scotland. That is the only reason that I rise to speak in this debate. I wish Lewis Macdonald all the best in his job.

15:45

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Before I decide whether I approve of Lewis Macdonald's proposed appointment as a deputy minister, will he be good enough to say whether he would be willing to receive a delegation of MSPs who are interested in an important planning matter in the Falkirk area, which was of great interest to all political parties during the by-election not so long ago? I refer to the proposed stadium for the Falkirk Football and Athletic Club, which would also be a great sport and leisure asset for the entire community.

Unfortunately, Lewis Macdonald's predecessor, Sam Galbraith, seemed disinclined to meet such a delegation. There is a relationship with Falkirk Council's proposed new structure plan, which would help facilitate construction of Falkirk FC's new stadium. Lewis Macdonald may or may not be aware that candidates of various parties, including Labour, signed a memorandum of agreement, guaranteeing—I repeat, guaranteeing—that the building of the new stadium would commence on 31 March 2001, which is next week. It is about time that politicians, particularly those in the Executive, who have power over planning and other matters, saw fit to receive a delegation of interested MSPs to discuss the matter further, in order to expedite approval of Falkirk Council's structure plan which, in turn, would help expedite the construction of the new stadium.

15:47

The First Minister: After that, I am sure that Lewis Macdonald is relieved he is still a back bencher for the moment.

I had a meeting with Robin Harper, and I respect very much his concerns. I have also arranged a meeting with Scottish Environment LINK to discuss at first hand the issues that its members have raised.

At that meeting, I will take the opportunity to tell LINK that the environment remains at the heart of

what the Executive is about. It is vital that we take environment and sustainability seriously. Let us reflect on the fact that we have a minister for the environment. That minister is Ross Finnie; his deputy is Rhona Brankin. I hope that the Parliament will share the vision that we will not have foot-and-mouth disease and the issues in the fishing industry carrying on for ever. When we take the synergies between the countryside, rural matters and the environment, there is a very positive case to be made. We should dispel any myth that the changes to ministerial responsibilities are in any way undermining our serious commitment to environmental issues. I am quite happy to take Robin Harper and LINK through that, but it is important to put on record the Executive's commitment to the environment.

It was slightly cruel of David McLetchie to raise the expectations of Jamie Stone. However, it is clear that there is an important track to be pursued in that regard, and it may well be the case that Jamie Stone will be doing greater things in the years that lie ahead. [MEMBERS: "Ah!"] However, there is no prospect at all for any Tory advancement, because the Tories still will not sit on the Holyrood progress group and consider the parliamentary issues involved. [Interruption.] David McLetchie can sit there and rant and rave, but the simple point is that if the Tories are serious about the Holyrood progress group, they should join it; if they are not serious about it, they should not join it.

David McLetchie: Mr McLeish's ministers should join it.

The First Minister: The Tories should put up or shut up. That is the plea from the Executive.

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Will the First Minister give way?

Members: No.

The First Minister: Well, I have a soft spot for Mr Salmond.

Mr Salmond: There is a fair bit of noise in the chamber, but I think I heard the First Minister say a few seconds ago that issues in the fishing industry will not carry on for ever. What did he mean by that?

The First Minister: I mean simply that our current discussions with the fishermen about the record package of £27 million will be resolved so that conservation and getting boats back to work will walk hand in hand.

Bruce Crawford raised some important environmental issues, which we all want to take seriously. However, nothing that has happened in terms of the environment portfolio will result in those issues not being dealt with seriously and effectively. I hope that members will agree to the

motion and that we will acknowledge that steps have been taken that will enhance the environment. Over the next few months, I think that we will see the benefits of that.

The Presiding Officer: Of course, I have no views on the appointment of ministers, but before I put the question, I want to record the thanks of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to Lewis Macdonald for the work that he done on the Holyrood progress group. That work has been of great assistance to the group and to Parliament. We appreciate it very much. [Applause.]

I ask members to check that their cards are in place and that the red lights in front of their cards are out.

The question is, that motion S1M-1775, in the name of Henry McLeish, on the appointment of Lewis Macdonald as a junior Scottish minister, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West)
 (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)
 (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)
 (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is as follows: For 84, Against 32, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that Lewis Macdonald be appointed as a junior Scottish Minister.

Rural Scotland

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-1771, in the name of Ross Finnie, on rural Scotland, and two amendments to that motion. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): On a point of order.

The Presiding Officer: I take it that it is a real point of order.

Alex Fergusson: It is, but I apologise to you and to the minister for making it at the start of the debate.

Given the delay that we have had in starting the debate, which is of national importance, is it possible for you to ensure that we get the full 90 minutes for the debate?

The Presiding Officer: Not quite. The Parliament decided this morning to move decision time to 5.15 pm. I have looked at the number of members who wish to speak and, if all members stick to their time limits, we should get everybody in. I am reasonably hopeful of that.

15:53

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): I am pleased to open the debate about the Scottish Executive's approach, not only to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, but to the impact of the outbreak on the rural economy, which is briefly outlined in our motion.

The Scottish Executive is committed to supporting and maintaining sustainable rural communities. That commitment was demonstrated by the early creation of a rural affairs department and further by our now distinctive approach to rural issues, the benefits of which are clear from the way in which we are reacting to the crisis. Five years ago we would have seen the current outbreak as simply an agricultural problem. Today we recognise that it is a problem for all rural areas, their people and the sectors that are reliant on them. The effects of the outbreak are far broader than to affect just agriculture. Our response recognises that.

This is not an issue just for my rural affairs department. It extends to other departments such as development, enterprise and lifelong learning, and local government. I have been asked to chair a ministerial committee on rural development to co-ordinate the Executive's response. That committee will use the information emerging from

our economic impact assessment group to fashion a response.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): During First Minister's questions, the First Minister said that the Executive understood the arguments for consequential compensation, and the Minister for Rural Development has just talked about the importance of economic impact assessments. What is the definition of consequential compensation and when is it likely to reach the surface? Mr Finnie promised a month ago that he would look at compensation issues, but we have no hard and fast details to show that any is coming.

Ross Finnie: I well understand the points that John Swinney raises. This is a very serious issue. However, I hope that Mr Swinney will agree that, although one or two individuals and business groups have presented helpful information, it is important that we take a moment or two before we act. A month ago, neither he, nor I, nor anyone else was aware of the extent to which the outbreak would put a grip around rural businesses. We are daily assessing the short, medium and long-term impacts and we will present our proposals to the chamber when we have completed that work. That will not take long, as I do not intend that the exercise should go on, but it is nonsense to suggest that we have a clear view of the precise impact on the affected sectors or the measures that will be required to assist those sectors. I assure Mr Swinney that we are clear about the importance of compensation, but it would be wrong of us to jump without having a clearer picture and a factual basis for judging our action.

Mr Swinney rose—

Ross Finnie: I must move on—I will let John Swinney back in later.

Our priorities for co-ordinating our approach are threefold. The first and foremost priority is the eradication of the disease through measures to rid the farming community of the virus as effectively and swiftly as we can. Secondly, we must provide immediate hardship relief to those individuals, businesses and communities who are most seriously affected. Thirdly, we must ensure the recovery of our rural areas with proposals to kick-start the rural economy once the immediate crisis is over.

I cannot emphasise enough that our immediate priority—our first base—is the eradication of the disease. We have taken the difficult decision to introduce a cull. We believe that we are now on the road to the most effective method of eradicating the disease.

We have had to place restrictions on livestock movements and on access to the countryside. I am only too aware that leisure activity and tourism

in the countryside has been badly disrupted by those measures. However, I want to dispel any false impression that restricted access and its impact on the tourism industry is down my list of priorities.

My department issued guidance on 7 March to all public and private land management bodies, asking that decisions on access should be made and reviewed on the basis of risk. Since then, my officials and members of the State Veterinary Service have worked closely with the relevant bodies in Scotland to provide more information, assist with clarification, ensure that there is a common understanding of the key factors that must be considered when risks are assessed and, most important, to move the whole process forward at a practical level.

Many bodies are already carrying out risk assessments on the basis of the original guidance, but I hope that the new development will provide an agreed model to assist the process. We have carried out the most recent consultation with the stakeholders—private bodies, the National Trust for Scotland and other organisations. I think that we have now finalised most of that work and I will announce tomorrow—in collaboration and co-operation with the stakeholders—an agreed set of measures which I hope will add clarity to what was stated on 7 March and will assist the tourism and other industries.

It is entirely appropriate that access should be treated differently in Scotland. After all, we have different land and topography to assess, different disease circumstances and different issues to collate. It is, therefore, important for us to issue our own collective guidance. I hope that members will agree that that is a major step forward and that it reflects the policy rationale that we are pursuing in relation to the outbreak.

Alex Fergusson: I accept what the minister says on the subject of having a policy in Scotland different from that south of the border. However, does he accept the position, as stated earlier by my colleague David Mundell, that it is important to have a certain amount of collaboration with Cumbria, given the joint geography?

Ross Finnie: As I said to David Mundell in response to an identical question that he put to me at the Rural Development Committee, one of the prime tasks of our officers—that is, officers from the Executive's rural affairs department, who have now been put into Dumfries and Galloway—is to liaise with their equivalents who have been appointed to the authorities in Cumbria, in order to ensure that the problem referred to by Mr Mundell is addressed.

I make it clear that we have moved on from the initial position of justifiable precaution. Scotland is

to be split into three zones: the area north of the Clyde and Forth is a provisional free area, while south of the Forth and Clyde will be two areas—the infected area and the at-risk area. I hope that once we have carried out the cull of all connected cases in the provisionally free area, we will be able to make progress as rapidly as possible and to unwind some of the regulations that are causing difficulty for our tourism and other industries.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP) *rose*—

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP) *rose*—

Ross Finnie: I will take an intervention from the senior Ewing first.

Dr Ewing: In the minister's long-term plans, will he seek to reduce what has come to light in relation to the enormous amount of movement of animals across great distances?

Ross Finnie: I think that Dr Ewing is talking about my long-term assessment, once we have eradicated the disease. Part of my assessment will include animal movements and restrictions and whether those issues require regulation. I was talking about our medium-term position—in fact, I was talking about a fairly short-term position. I want to get to the point at which I can relax some of the regulations in part of the north of Scotland.

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): On the three zones and the position of small farmers who cannot get their stock to slaughterhouses as direct transport is uneconomic at present, at what stage does the minister believe he will be able to consider the importance of collection points in the free areas? The minister knows that I have made particular representations about Maud, but the issue affects small farmers the length and breadth of Scotland and covers not only economic but animal welfare considerations.

Ross Finnie: I am well aware of that issue, and, as I have indicated to Mr Salmond, once we have established the three zones, we will be able to consider, in a different way, the restrictive regulations that are in place. I hope to be able to make progress on that matter, but I must now move on.

Our second priority is that of immediate hardship relief. We are trying to develop a number of responses. I have put in hand work to assess the issues and to examine the full breadth of the rural economy, including agriculture, tourism, haulage, meat processing and the many other industries that were mentioned during question time this afternoon, such as the power-line workers who are being laid off in the Borders. I have also put in place an economic impact assessment.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise has put in

place a phone line to enable businesses to outline the ways in which the outbreak is affecting them. That welcome initiative will help us understand and monitor and will be repeated elsewhere.

However, action cannot wait. In relation to reserved matters and action at a UK level, Mr Michael Meacher has taken a number of initiatives. I should emphasise—as Wendy Alexander stated during question time—that the task force in which we are involved is a UK-wide initiative. On Tuesday, Alasdair Morrison attended the task force's most recent meeting. I repeat the measures that have been put in place. UK ministers have asked the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise to take a sympathetic approach to businesses experiencing financial problems as a result of the outbreak. That will involve using maximum flexibility to allow deferral of the payment of taxes and national insurance contributions.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Ross Finnie: No. I must make progress or I will be in serious danger of not making one or two rather important points.

UK ministers are also considering the scope for continuing credit for businesses already in the UK-wide small firms loan guarantee scheme and the introduction of maximum flexibility in the administration of job seekers allowance. Those are important and welcome deferrals of payments. In Scotland, we hope to be able to announce shortly proposals for rates relief, a matter that was referred to earlier. I have met representatives of all Scotland's joint-stock banks and Alasdair Morrison has also asked the banks to take a constructive look at businesses that may be in trouble.

Mr Swinney: The minister has repeatedly used the words “shortly”, “soon” and “not far away”. Will he give us a definitive time scale for when the Government's assistance package will be made public?

Ross Finnie: The earlier parts have already been made public, including the question of deferrals. All that we have to do now is finalise the rates relief issue. I anticipate that that will be done by the early part of next week.

Moreover, as Wendy Alexander said in her reply to a question earlier this afternoon, the enterprise networks have been giving priority through the small business gateway to businesses that are suffering a downturn as a consequence of the crisis. That will cover advice on matters including cash flow planning, renegotiating payments and restructuring the businesses so as to assist small businesses to manage through the crisis. The enterprise networks have also been in touch with the Employment Service about making training for

work available to people who may lose their jobs as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. As I said earlier, on top of that assistance there will be scope for local authorities to assist through relief in the payment of rates.

I will now turn to the measures we are taking with regard to the tourism industry. I am in no doubt that industry representatives would wish me to say that there has been some misrepresentation both at home and abroad about the disease and its consequences. That has led to prospective visitors changing their plans and early indications of the results of that are very serious.

It is vital that all of us get across the message that Scotland remains open for business. *visitscotland* is rising to the challenge of taking measures to address the immediate problem by providing information over its website and through its phone helpline about attractions in the areas that are open. *visitscotland* will also work with the Executive to publicise the new guidelines on access to the countryside. That will begin the process of eradicating the misconceptions that have led to many of the difficulties facing the tourism industry.

In addition, we are planning ahead for the time when we will be in a position to say that the disease has been eradicated. I hope that we are in no doubt that that time will come sooner rather than later. A key component of any recovery plan will be the rebuilding of the damage that has been done to the Scottish and UK tourism brand. That will require a concerted effort by *visitscotland* and the British Tourist Authority to market Scotland abroad. I know that Alasdair Morrison is in close touch with tourism interests to work up such plans.

More generally, the effect on the rural economy will last beyond the eradication of the disease. We will need to redouble our substantial efforts to rebuild the rural economy. I can assure the Parliament that that remains our goal.

I appreciate that the amendments add one or two minor matters, but, to be blunt, our effort is narrowly focused and is designed to do all that is necessary to effect recovery in rural Scotland. I do not believe that either amendment adds to the substance of the motion and shall therefore oppose them. I ask colleagues to support the motion and welcome the positive actions that the Government is taking to address the problems that face us as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to rural areas, especially during and after the foot-and-mouth crisis; endorses the Executive's commitment to the eradication of the disease as essential for the long-term future of the rural economy, including tourism; endorses the provision of clear guidance on public access; welcomes the steps being taken to provide

hardship relief, and supports the Executive's commitment to assist Scotland's vital rural communities and industries.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): In view of the subject's importance, I have allowed a significant overrun. I shall allow, if absolutely necessary, a little leeway to the lead speakers in the other parties as well.

16:09

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I begin by emphasising, as has been mentioned before in debates following ministerial statements on the subject, that, in pursuit of the Scottish Government's policy to eradicate the disease, the minister has the Scottish National Party's support—as well as, I believe, that of the other parties in the chamber. There is a degree of unanimity among the parties that it is up to us to work together to complete that task.

The minister's remarks focused not on the practical detail, huge logistic problems and personal tragedy that surround the policy to eradicate the disease, but on the other parts of the rural economy. I therefore intend to restrict my remarks to those other parts.

We must not pit tourism against farming and those who work in tourism against those who are in farming. The industries are interlinked and interdependent. We know that many farmers are engaged in tourism in a plethora of ways. We should never forget that our tourism industry is almost totally dependent upon the scenery of Scotland. That scenery has not been created by accident but by the cultivation and the activities of the real stewards and conservationists of Scotland—the farmers and crofters who have been tending the land for centuries. We must not allow anybody who seeks to make divisions between tourism and farming to succeed. I hope that there is unity on that point.

I urge the minister to reconsider the proposal that I made on 28 February and again on 15 March, because I believe that there is still confusion and misunderstanding among the public as to the do's and don'ts of foot-and-mouth. I am mindful of the fact that Mr Michael Meacher, I think on 20 March, called for a public information campaign for precisely the reasons that I have advocated. Had the minister not been so chivalrous, and accepted my intervention as opposed to my mother's, I would have asked whether he intended to engage in such a campaign. If he wishes to intervene now to tell me the answer, I will happily give way.

To be serious, I hope that the minister will go away and reconsider the matter. Scotland is now divided into three areas and people will

immediately ask what that means. They will ask what, in practice, it means for them in each of those areas. They will ask whether they can go to the countryside or not. I am sure that the minister will address those issues.

Scotland's rural economy is facing an unprecedented crisis. I say that in all seriousness, having spent the past three weeks almost totally engaged in the matter and in dealing with messages from my constituents and from all around Scotland. Those messages—especially from people in tourism, but also from mountain guides, from people working with livestock, from hauliers and others—are heartrending. I want to refer to some of them. Mr Bulmer, a mountain guide, wrote:

"Twelve years ago I formed a company in Newtonmore to provide walking and mountaineering holidays in the Highlands. Due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak my firm now has no income. All hill movement is completely restricted ... Skiers have been told they can go to the Cairngorms to enjoy their sport. I however have been cancelling bookings at guest houses and hotels because I am not allowed on Cairngorm to do my job."

He has no income. He is not alone.

Another message was from the owner of an Icelandic horse-trekking business in Spean Bridge. She states:

"We have cancellations from overseas for our riding holidays operating from May—Sept ... Total financial loss stands in the region of £15,000.00".

Another message from the company that runs a barge called Fingal of Caledonia on the Caledonian canal refers to losses of £5,000 a week. Those messages are a representative sample.

I understand that the economic assessment that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has spoken about is necessary and I am pleased that she has stayed for the debate. I praise the efforts of the Federation of Small Businesses, which has been doing a sterling job—especially in the Dumfries area—to discover the real effects on business. It has found that nine out of 10 small businesses in Dumfries face termination. That indicates the depth of the crisis; and I am not sure that the crisis will be any smaller in areas such as Lochaber in my constituency. I say that because of the constant messages and phone calls that I receive while trying to respond immediately to constituents, to find out their problems and experiences.

That is why I was pleased to hear the First Minister say that he was able to develop consequential compensation. I hope, however, that that phrase will not become one that is associated with an expression of broad good will towards a group in Scotland that is in dire need. Rather, I hope that it will translate into a measure

around which we can all unite.

Ross Finnie: I referred to the Federation of Small Businesses in my speech. Does Mr Ewing agree that while its survey is a valuable pointer, a sample of less than 1 per cent is not the basis on which to conclude that 90 per cent of businesses will fail, and that we need a deeper analysis before we draw that kind of conclusion?

Fergus Ewing: I did state specifically that I welcome the economic impact assessment as a step that needs to be taken. I was pleased that in response to the intervention from the leader of the SNP, the minister said that a statement will be made next week. We expect that statement to encompass the First Minister's remarks that we must consider consequential compensation.

Because this is a crisis of unprecedented scale, we must act promptly and with a sense of urgency. That is recognised in the news release from the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and Gaelic, Alasdair Morrison, entitled "Immediate hardship relief package", but I am bound to say, with great respect, that the measures in the press release will not do. They just will not do. We must do better than that. I speak as somebody who has run a business when I say that asking the Treasury or the Inland Revenue or HM Customs and Excise not to send out bills just will not work, because they have statutory obligations to fulfil. VAT bills must be paid quarterly, and unless those bodies are given a direction, which we have not seen and about which no details have been given, I worry that the press release is merely words.

I hope that there will be an emergency package of aid measures. I welcome the fact that there will be clarity in the guidelines on access to the countryside, because as the minister stated on 15 March, there is confusion and conflict. It is a desperate priority to re-open Scotland. The message from the SNP is that in order to demonstrate a real commitment to rural Scotland, we must have a far better package and far more than has been proposed so far.

I move amendment S1M-1771.2, to leave out from "the Scottish Executive's" to end and insert:

"the united approach taken by the Executive and opposition parties in recognising the need to eradicate the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease; believes that the rural economy is facing unprecedented difficulties; urges the Executive to launch a public information campaign in relation to the disease with clearer and more precise guidelines governing access to the countryside, and believes that the extent of the financial difficulties now being suffered is so grave that a comprehensive package of measures must be introduced to assist all aspects of economic life in our rural communities."

16:18

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): I draw members' attention to my entry in the "Register of Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament", as I have done on previous days on which we have debated this issue.

The issue that is before us, and the complexities in the rural economy that have come about as a result of foot-and-mouth, have gone from being a crisis to a national emergency. It is a great disappointment that today we have news that not only France and Holland, but now the Irish Republic, are involved in the outbreak.

I was lucky enough, as readers of the *Daily Mail* will be aware, to be in the European Parliament earlier this week at a meeting of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on Tuesday and Wednesday. It was during the Wednesday morning session, at which I was present, that the committee discussed at some length issues regarding the outbreak of foot-and-mouth in the United Kingdom, came to some conclusions, and also asked several questions of a representative of the Commission, who was a vet himself. I was delighted to discover that the view of the vast majority of committee members was that the methodology that was being applied in the United Kingdom was appropriate, and that they were fully supportive of it. The veterinary surgeon who represented the Commission that day was absolutely supportive of the methodology that was being applied to solve the problem in the United Kingdom.

The committee took a similar view to that which I took, in that it was concerned about the way in which the methods were being applied and particularly about the apparent absence of appropriate manpower to carry out the declared policy. I am particularly concerned that although it is one week since the minister announced that 200,000 sheep would be killed in Scotland, we appear only now to be beginning to move towards achieving that aim.

During that week, many more infections could have taken place. Therefore, I urge the minister to take every opportunity to find assistance to increase the human resources that are available to deal with the crisis. The European Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee seemed to be willing for a move to be made towards giving assistance, if necessary.

Ross Finnie: Does the member agree that, in Dumfries and Galloway, the pinchpoint in delivering our strategic aim of the cull is not manpower, but the disposal of animals, and that that relates to the absence of suitable abattoirs and rendering plants, which makes the task more difficult?

Alex Johnstone: Yes. There are several problems. I am delighted to take the opportunity to welcome the First Minister's announcement that he is prepared to enter into negotiations to get the Army to assist where possible with some of the measures.

As Fergus Ewing said, it is our responsibility to raise one or two other subjects—particularly issues that relate to other rural businesses. I will deal first with tourism. Much has been said, and my colleagues will say more. I was especially concerned to hear this morning that a representative of the National Trust suggested that the National Trust's properties throughout Scotland might be open, including those in affected, or—as we have described them—closed areas.

It is widely known that many tourists come to the United Kingdom and particularly Scotland to visit National Trust properties. I am delighted with the three-area policy that the minister proposed, and I wish many such properties in the north of Scotland to be reopened to the public, but I would be gravely concerned if properties in the south-west were also opened. If they were open, inevitably many tourists would choose to make the trip around Scotland to visit properties as they traditionally do. They could transfer infection around the country.

I was informed that many English newspapers carried advertisements for which the Government paid, which detailed the areas of the United Kingdom—particularly those in England and Wales—that are open to the public or open for business as usual. In very small print, the advertisements said that the information related to England. It is a disappointment that similar statements could not be published in the press in Scotland at the same time. However, I am sure that the minister will take the opportunity to go into that in greater detail.

I will raise two other issues. If they are slightly disjointed, it is simply because our debating time is limited, and I must say a few things.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please be brief.

Alex Johnstone: I was contacted by the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland, which asked me to raise the issue of livestock markets in Scotland. There is concern about the financial implications of the continued inability to conduct business. I have figures that indicate that markets in Scotland had a turnover of £178 million last year. Although a short-term closure can be recovered subsequently, as the stock will still exist in many areas, it is becoming more obvious as time goes by that the livestock markets are in increasing danger. It is important that we deal with that, as livestock markets are

important in setting the price or value of stock. That is shown by circumstances at the moment, which reflect the fact that the absence of markets seems to have allowed the price of stock to fall radically in certain sectors.

I will also mention one aspect of the possibility of an election. It is not my responsibility to enter into the politics of that, but I and many other members have not made random visits to farms. I will certainly advise my political colleagues not to visit farms during an election campaign. Is the minister prepared to consider any way in which he can adjust the way that information is held by the department that he heads to allow political parties to make direct contact with the farming community by post or other means, to avoid any necessity for visits to be made around farms?

I move amendment S1M-1771.1, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"endorses the Executive's commitment to the eradication of the foot-and-mouth disease as essential for the long term future of the rural economy, including tourism; calls upon the Executive to take further steps to speed up the process of dealing with the disease on the ground, including the further use of the army; expresses the need for clear guidance on public access; urges the consideration of such further steps as are necessary to provide hardship relief to assist Scotland's vital rural communities and industries, and calls upon the Executive, acting in concert with Her Majesty's Government and the European Union, to ensure that all meat imports are subject to the same rigorous public health and animal welfare standards as our domestic produce."

16:26

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): The crisis caused by foot-and-mouth disease in rural parts of Scotland, particularly in Dumfries and Galloway, graphically illustrates the interdependence of key sectors of the rural economy. Much attention has so far been focused on the appalling consequences of the outbreak for the farming industry. There were 61 cases reported this morning in Dumfries and Galloway, including some extremely valuable pedigree cattle and sheep in the Ruthwell area. We will also face the elimination of all sheep in parts of Dumfriesshire in a mass cull that is due to commence shortly.

The effects are not restricted to agriculture. Local surveys that have been undertaken by the area tourist board and the Federation of Small Businesses have produced some alarming statistics. The area tourist board had returns from 355 tourism businesses, which indicated that £650,000 of business had been lost to tourism in Dumfries and Galloway between 1 and 19 March and that 182 people had moved from full-time to part-time work and 73 people had been laid off in less than three weeks.

The crisis has come at a particularly bad time for

the tourism industry. Small, seasonal businesses have accumulated significant overdrafts over the winter months. Normally, such overdrafts would be reduced during the spring and summer season. This year, that will not happen; those people will have little or no income to service their debts. Nor will they be able to offer seasonal employment, which is important in rural areas. They also do not require the services of suppliers, so enterprises down that chain are affected.

Alex Fergusson: Does Elaine Murray agree with the view of many tourism businesses in Dumfries and Galloway, that whereas they would normally expect their season to kick off at Easter—in a month's time—the reality that they face is that the season will not begin until Easter 2002?

Dr Murray: That is quite likely. Do I get extra time for interventions, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. We must keep things tight. You have a maximum of five minutes.

Dr Murray: I have already referred to the problems experienced by visitor attractions. We need to consider action in order to keep attractions open, such as the possibility of using lottery funding, as I suggested to the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning. If our visitor attractions are closed, there will be less for people to see in the area, which will have a long-term effect on tourism.

The forestry trade is affected because machinery is not moving and logs are deteriorating while they lie around. The building trade has laid off workers who are unable to work on farms in restricted areas. Retail sales are down and town centres are lying quiet because there are few visitors to spend money and many local people are too insecure about their future to spend money on anything other than essentials.

Other areas of local life have been disrupted. For example, 25 per cent of pupils at Lockerbie Academy are unable to get to school—many have important exams to sit in the near future. Even the common ridings and the ridings of the marches—important and historic cultural celebrations—have had to be cancelled.

We need two strategies: action for survival during the crisis and action for regeneration once the crisis is over. That is true for all rural Scotland, but mostly for Dumfries and Galloway as we have a longer and steeper hill to climb. The message must be reinforced that rural Scotland is not closed and that Dumfries and Galloway is not closed—there are restrictions on outdoor pursuits, but there is no danger to human beings visiting the area. A colleague has just told me that she had been advised not to come on holiday to Dumfries

and Galloway because she has a dog. That advice has been rescinded, but it is just the sort of misinformation that we can well do without.

The measures that are needed in the short term have also been mentioned. I welcome the measures in relation to tax, rates relief and support from the financial sector to which the Minister for Environment and Rural Development referred.

I repeat my urge that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning consider lottery funding—I am pleased with her response to my question on that. The cull of sheep must be completed as quickly as possible, to minimise the pain and destruction experienced by local communities. I wonder whether the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Scottish Executive rural affairs department have actively considered the belt-and-braces approach that has been adopted by the Netherlands, which involves vaccination followed by cull.

In the longer term, we need an active campaign that promotes Scotland, and especially Dumfries and Galloway, in order to attract tourists and new businesses. The Executive is planning to introduce broad-band technology into schools—I urge that that is progressed as quickly as possible to enhance the information and communications technology infrastructure of rural areas.

The minister referred to the need to kick-start the economy. The FSB has suggested that that could be done by supporting the building trade. Again, the Executive has plans to increase the supply of housing for rent in rural areas. The council has plans to rebuild and repair a number of local schools. There is the possibility of putting money in to help to restart the economy in the area. We need a strategy for diversification. I hope that Nick Brown will follow through his willingness to support farmers who want to leave the industry. I ask whether it is possible to re-examine aspects of modulation of common agricultural policy moneys in light of the crisis.

These are desperate times. It is extremely difficult to catch a glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel, especially when, in Dumfries and Galloway, that tunnel seems to be full of smoke. However, creating such a glimpse of light is a duty of Government, and I urge the Executive to do all that it can. I support the motion.

16:31

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Few of us in the chamber can grasp what our farming communities are going through. The challenge is not only to control and eliminate the disease but to minimise the impact, and especially the long-term damage, on the wider economy.

I want to touch on a few issues, beginning with the plight of Scotland's auction marts, which ground to a halt four weeks ago. I understand that the ban on the auction marts is to be revised on 27 March. Aberdeen & Northern Marts' auction marts employ 50 full-time staff and 100 casual staff. Those staff are idle because the auction mart cannot operate, and £40,000 a week is being lost. We recognise the economic role that the marts play in the rural economy. The mart at Maud, in Alex Salmond's constituency, was closed recently. The smaller marts around Scotland cannot be subsidised by other businesses and face especially difficult times.

That takes me to Alex Salmond's suggestion about using the marts as collection centres. Is the minister working with Europe so that, if the ban continues in the auction marts, they can be used as collection centres? The current restrictions on the movement of livestock discriminate against the smaller producers who have a couple of beasts to get to market. A lorry used to go round the farms, picking up all the beasts and taking them to the abattoir. That is not the case now. It is uneconomical to get a lorry just for a couple of beasts. We could help people who are accumulating livestock on their farms by establishing collection points as soon as possible. In addition, what is the minister doing for the auction marts?

We must remember that the auction marts have a social function, acting as gathering points for the farming community. The auction marts were never busier than in the BSE crisis. Farmers would come together and discuss the crisis and their common problems. They cannot do that this time, because of the restrictions. Indeed, farmers throughout Scotland are becoming increasingly isolated. That highlights the need for the minister to give support to the groups that are trying to help farmers cope with stress and other problems.

Michael Russell: Will the member pay tribute to the work of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, which is phoning each affected farmer from the control centre in Dumfries? It will continue to do that work and will increase it. The WRVS is making a major contribution, which should be noted.

Richard Lochhead: I am happy to pay tribute to that effort—I hope that it is being replicated throughout Scotland. However, many organisations need more assistance from the Government. We must not forget that the crisis has an emotional toll on the farming community.

On tourism, the crisis is a double whammy for farmers. Many farmers have had enormous financial difficulties in recent years; they have not had their problems to seek. Some have tried to diversify, and opened up bed and breakfasts and

chalets. However, the nature of the crisis means that they cannot take advantage of the income from that source.

Tourism in the north-east of Scotland, which is a low-risk area, has been affected. Many trips from overseas, particularly to Deeside, have been cancelled because of the crisis. I ask the minister to intervene, because the tourist office in Aberdeen, the gateway to the north-east of Scotland, is about to close. The staff will be halved and the remaining employees will have to relocate. Now, more than ever, we need a good tourism effort to make up for the damage. The Aberdeen tourism office will suffer, lose staff and close temporarily, so I hope that the minister will intervene by providing a financial injection.

Finally, I stress that this is a debate about rural Scotland. It is not just about the farming communities, but about the impact on the wider economy. Surely this, of all times, is when we need the economic contribution that is made by our fishing communities. Why should we undermine a strategy that tries to protect the wider rural economy by putting 25,000 jobs at risk because of the way in which we are handling the current fishing crisis? The fishing communities have an enormous contribution to make to the rural economy in the coming years, but they need to have the right policies in place now. I ask the minister once more to revisit that issue.

16:36

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I thank the minister for arranging to hold the debate and for his regular statements to the Parliament at this very difficult time.

There are many issues that we need to consider when all this is over, but there are a few that we need to consider now. First, I ask that the Scottish Crofters Union be involved in talks and decision making about foot-and-mouth disease. I know that the crofting counties are not directly affected by foot-and-mouth, but we cannot be complacent. Should they become affected, we would have to deal with the outbreak differently. Crofts are not contained, and sheep from different crofts mix together in the township and on the hill. One case of foot-and-mouth could wipe out at least a whole township and possibly an awful lot more.

At the Rural Development Committee this week, I asked the minister whether there was a risk of spreading the disease from the Moray firth when wintering sheep are taken home from the Moray firth to crofts in the Highlands. There will be pressure to return those sheep, as the farms where they are placed at the moment will want to begin their planting in the spring. The response that I received was that the serological testing

would take place on a pro-rata basis to demonstrate to the EU that the UK was disease-free, but it was not clear when that testing would take place. I ask that that testing take place once the culls in low-risk areas are completed. That would allow the movement of animals to be carried out with less risk.

My second question for the minister concerns abattoirs. When he made his first statement on the disease, I asked him whether he would consider funding small abattoirs to enable meat to be processed locally. Animals travelling long distances have been shown to be a major contributor to the spread of the outbreak and the minister admitted that the lack of abattoirs is holding back the disposal of culled animals. In the House of Commons yesterday, Charles Kennedy said that

“one of the things that needs serious searching attention is the absence, all too often, of abattoirs in various parts of the country and the knock-on effect that that is having, not least in the present crisis, with the moving of animals and the traceability of the problem itself”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 21 March 2001; Vol 365, c 340.]

I ask the minister to reconsider that option. Although I understand that it cannot be undertaken as a quick fix and will take time to put in place, I think that it is important that we begin to address that problem. Not only would it control the spread of disease, but it would allow farmers to add value to their product locally.

It is important to give information to the public. I know that the Scottish Executive rural affairs department is working hard to provide up-to-date information on its website. I very much appreciate that work, but many people do not watch television or read the newspapers daily, and they are left with the impression that mixed messages are being sent out. All of us who are involved in dealing with the outbreak know that advice needs to change with time to suit the current situation. We need to get that message over to the public, who also need to know where they can access the most up-to-date information, albeit that that information may change from time to time depending on the situation in which we find ourselves. The public also need to be made more aware of why we are taking the decisions that we are taking. Many people question the decisions that are made. If they had the information behind those decisions, they would understand and adhere to the advice that is being issued. Information is an important tool for encouraging people to work together to beat the disease.

In the long term, we need to look at how we farm and what our markets are. For too long, we have encouraged commodity production and I feel that we have to move away from that. However, that is for future discussion. I would also like the minister to speak to the Scottish Agricultural College.

Jamie Stone mentioned at question time that the Thurso veterinarian centre is due to close in the very near future. I ask the minister whether he could meet with people from the lab, or at least speak with the college to ask it to defer the decision until the outbreak is over and we can assess whether we need the lab.

It is important that we all work together. I pay tribute to the other parties in the Parliament, which have supported the Executive. It is important and makes the work of the Executive much easier at this difficult time.

16:40

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): My heart goes out to the farmers and their families in Dumfries and Galloway; they are in a state of shellshock as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. I have cousins at Lockerbie who have already lost 180 dairy cattle and 900 sheep. As a farmer, I share their pain.

The Executive motion asks the Parliament to welcome its commitment

“during and after the foot-and-mouth crisis”.

Although I do not doubt the Executive’s commitment, I do not believe that we can talk about after the crisis yet. On the news this morning, a vet said that he believed that the epidemic would peak in early May, which is six weeks from now. It will not be until the number of cases begins to drop that we will be able to talk about after the crisis.

It is essential that the Government puts out clear and consistent guidelines. The No 1 priority must be to stop the outbreak spreading to other areas of Scotland; the No 2 priority must be to give tourist operators and businesses clear advice on the first priority.

As a representative of the Highlands and Islands, I call for a clear and consistent line, because the worst news that we could possibly get in that area is of an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease there. Tourism faces a rotten season, but confusion will cause only further misery and financial loss.

The public have been wonderful and have shown great responsibility. Local businesses have shown great stoicism and have made a huge sacrifice for the benefit of the agricultural sector. I congratulate them, but they must be supported by clear messages. At the weekend, I spoke to two owners of small, family-run hotels in Argyll about the crisis. One owner said to me, “I have no bookings for the spring and summer. People come here to walk, fish and use the countryside. What can I tell them when they ring me? I am surrounded by Forestry Commission land, which is

closed, and farming land, which is also closed. I cannot even take my dogs for a walk, so I tell inquirers not to come until it is safe to do so. The Government must tell us what to do.”

We must not be dishonest. There must not be confusion over whether the countryside is open or closed. A non-infected area, such as the Highlands and Islands, must take every precaution against infection being brought in from infected areas. The guidelines must be clear and unambiguous on the best way to achieve that.

There must be no confusion among ministers representing different interests. The main priority is to stop the disease spreading; ministers must emphasise that. Tourism in Scotland will not recover until we are clear of foot-and-mouth disease.

The first priority is the riddance of the disease, whatever it takes. There are questions to be answered, such as: is the Executive encouraging angling authorities to sell permits? Will the Caledonian canal be open for Easter?

On 10 February, Wendy Alexander met Highland tourist operators and agreed that Highland tourism would top the agenda at her first meeting with the new chief executive of *visitscotland*. I am sure that she will keep her word and meet the commitments that she made at that meeting, but I remind her of them now. Tourism in the Highlands needs a return of special funds for niche marketing of different areas; specialist branding for Highlands and Islands destinations; and, above all, a big reduction in the cost of petrol and diesel.

Above all, we must get Scotland clear of foot-and-mouth disease or we will not have enough visitors. There must be a rescue package for local businesses, hotels and people who run bed-and-breakfast outlets. They are making a huge sacrifice so that we can rid our country of this appalling menace.

Once the outbreak is over, our Government must trace the source and seriously consider banning the import of meat from countries where the disease is endemic. If we must import meat, we should get it—and encourage the rest of Europe to get it—from our Commonwealth allies in Australia and New Zealand, which have never had a trace of the disease.

16:44

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I agree with much of what Jamie McGrigor said. It is not an exaggeration to say that farming communities in the Scottish Borders—across the country, but especially in the Scottish Borders—are virtually in a state of

mourning for their friends and colleagues in Dumfries and Galloway, who have suffered so dreadfully in the current outbreak. They are also grieving deeply for closer neighbours who, even as we speak, are seeing pedigree flocks and flocks that have lived on particular hillsides for generations—which are irreplaceable because they have been hefted to the hill, as they say—destroyed in the hope of offering some protection to their farming neighbours. Borders farmers are desperately worried as they wait for results from a suspect farm in Peebles and are hoping that the results will prove negative.

In the circumstances, we owe it to those men and women to be very careful before we relax restrictions in a way that might suggest to the public that the earlier restrictions were overdone. There were very good reasons for imposing widespread restrictions in the first place and we must not expect it to be simple and straightforward to ease them in a precise way.

Nothing could illustrate more clearly that no man is an island than the course of this outbreak. An ill-considered action—or perhaps worse—in Heddon-on-the-Wall has had implications that have, in various ways, afflicted the whole of the United Kingdom from Cornwall to the Shetlands and which have now spread beyond our shores. On that basis, I urge the Parliament to remember that we must first isolate and eradicate the disease. It will be welcome and helpful if we are able to allow more freedom than before for farmers and visitors in areas of lesser risk. However, farmers in the Borders are apprehensive about sending out signals that might lead to a drop in vigilance.

I emphasise that I welcome proposals to designate areas of proportionate risk and the Executive's recognition that there must be hardship relief.

Ross Finnie: In view of the member's obvious anxiety for his constituency, I am sure that he will share my relief that the Peebles case has been cleared.

Ian Jenkins: The minister could not have said anything that would have pleased me more.

We should promote the fact that tourists can undertake genuinely rewarding activities in every area of Scotland, including Dumfries and Galloway. However, the matter is not simple. In a complex situation that involves many authorities and agencies, oversimplification is dangerous and clarity is difficult to achieve. A proportionate response is correct and, although clarity must be carefully worked at to ensure that people are aware of the set-up, we cannot pretend that that can always be done in words of one syllable.

If we do not control the outbreak, we will all be drawn downwards into ever more desperate

difficulties. Patience now, even with all the problems that it brings, might allow us to beat the disease; impatience could wreck everything. We must not allow what might sometimes appear to be a short-term difference between the importance of farming and tourism to pull us in opposite directions and make us take wrong decisions. We are all in this together and we must work together to ensure that we first eradicate the disease and then, immediately after, introduce a rescue package.

16:48

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I want to make two brief points. First, I support everything that the minister has done, is doing and plans to do. I also support and express my sympathy for the very sensible SNP and Conservative amendments.

Secondly, I hope that, before we reach the end of this dreadful epidemic, the minister will pay some attention to the responses to the rural development policy consultation. Perhaps he will then be able to pay even closer attention to how contributions can be made to the security, safety, attraction and profitability of our countryside by developing more area and local marketing networks; farmers markets; local slaughtering and butchering facilities; agri-environment schemes; low-import farming; biodiversity action plans; organic farming; rates relief for small and medium-sized enterprises; and support for small post offices and shops.

By the way, I shall be taking my Easter holiday in Oban.

16:50

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): None of us would have anticipated the background to this debate. The speed at which foot-and-mouth has spread has put pressure on many areas. It is easy in hindsight to look back and say what should and should not have been done.

The Highlands and Islands have not had an outbreak, but I know a farmer who had livestock slaughtered this week as a precaution because of contact with the Longtown mart. His name is Bill Keith. He was on television at the weekend, looking very sad and dignified. He is glad now to be giving up farming as he is nearing retirement. I know of his care for his animals; the loss of them is devastating for him and people like him. However, it is not just the agriculture industry that is suffering, and I want to concentrate my remarks on the severe impact on the tourism industry.

The cross-party group on tourism met to discuss all the issues involved in the foot-and-mouth

outbreak. At the meeting were representatives of the Scottish Tourist Board, area tourist boards, the National Trust for Scotland, the National Farmers Union of Scotland and tourist operators. There was no doubt at the meeting about the gravity of the situation and the need for urgency. The crisis highlights the importance of the tourism industry to Scotland and its fragility.

At the meeting, representatives were already reporting a severe downturn in both urban and rural Scotland. Scotland as a whole suffers when the tourism industry faces problems. There is a knock-on effect on shops, filling stations, taxi drivers, tradesmen—who will have no winter work refurbishing hotels—and hotel and restaurant workers. It is therefore in the interests of the whole of Scotland to ensure that the tourism industry is able to get back on its feet. I believe that the crisis in the tourism industry is potentially more serious than the crisis in the farming industry, although that is not to belittle what is happening in the farming industry—there is real despair out there.

Another important issue has been partly addressed by today's newspaper advertisements. We must say positively that Scotland is not closed. There are country towns, castles, museums, golf courses and beaches, all of which are open and willing to receive visitors, where livestock are not put at risk. There are areas where there has been an outbreak and people must obey the notices there, but the areas above the Forth and the Clyde have had no outbreak. I welcome Ross Finnie's announcement that that area is now a provisionally free area, but I ask him to clarify what that means as regards the lifting of restrictions.

Where it is safe, people must be encouraged back into the countryside and given simple guidance on how to minimise the risk. Whatever the Government can do to help, it must do it quickly. People must start to go back and spend money in rural areas.

There must also be joined-up working between different agencies. At the meeting of the cross-party group, some members were understandably frustrated that there was not more communication between organisations, but the outbreak caught everyone by surprise and different organisations work at different speeds.

I thank the minister for detailing, to some extent, the financial support that will be given to the tourism industry. I welcome that, but tourism businesses cannot operate without visitors. I ask the minister to provide significant funding for tourism promotion, particularly in my constituency in the Highlands and Islands. Such funding is essential for the future of the industry. I ask him to provide it quickly, because we need to begin now to attract visitors for the Easter holiday.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): We now move to the closing speeches. I have noted that three members who wished to speak in the debate were not called.

16:53

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): There can be no doubt but that the Scottish Executive and the Parliament rate the importance of rural Scotland very highly indeed. It is a tragedy that we have been struck by the foot-and-mouth crisis just as rural Scotland was recovering from the after-effects of BSE. It is commendable that the Minister for Environment and Rural Development has worked so closely with everyone involved in tackling the crisis. I endorse fully the swift action that he has taken to ensure that the disease is contained and then eradicated.

I particularly welcome the minister's announcement earlier this week on dividing Scotland into three areas: the infected area, the at-risk area and the provisionally free area. It is important that vigilance is maintained in all three. The fact that they have now been designated indicates that the regulations restricting livestock movements will be unwound progressively, starting in the provisionally free area. Although no time scale has yet been given, that must be good news.

Many concerns have been voiced today about the damage being done by the foot-and-mouth outbreak to our tourism industry. I confirm that I have been contacted by many hoteliers and others in West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine who are suffering losses because people have been discouraged from entering our countryside. That is why I welcome the fact that the Scottish Executive has given clear guidance on public access.

I was pleased to hear Leslie Gardner, the principal veterinary officer in Scotland, tell the Rural Development Committee on Tuesday that

"the Executive has issued sensible and proportional advice. The disease is spread by close contact with animals. Humans are not affected by the disease. If people have close contact with animals—if they handle animals or have close contact with the faeces of affected animals—and then mix with other animals, that poses a risk. Walking down a road or along a path does not pose a risk. If people were approaching animals and feeding them—which they should not do—that poses a theoretical risk, but walking across hills and seeing a sheep in the distance does not"—[*Official Report, Rural Development Committee, 20 March 2001; c 1793.*]

I was appreciative of that advice and the sooner people in the provisionally uninfected area—north of the Clyde-Forth line—realise that, the better. I note that Fergus Ewing is not here but even Lochaber, Badenoch and Strathspey are not closed. We need to send that message out to the

tourism industry. Fergus mentioned that his constituents are under the impression that the Cairngorms are closed. They are not and that message has to be put across for the sake of our beleaguered tourism industry. Today, the minister said that Scotland is open for business. That is as it should be and we should shout that from the rooftops.

I am particularly pleased that the motion refers to our tourism industry, because unless we get the message across that provided people keep away from livestock it is safe for them to visit rural Scotland, especially north of the Clyde-Forth line, we risk inflicting untold and unnecessary damage to the livelihoods of many more people who work in our fragile rural economy. To Jamie McGrigor, I say that the Highlands are not closed and should not be closed.

Mr McGrigor: I am as keen on the promotion of tourism in the Highlands as Mr Rumbles is, but is he suggesting that we should encourage people from infected areas to come into non-infected areas?

Mr Rumbles: We must follow the advice that the principal veterinary officer gave the Rural Development Committee on Tuesday. That is what I am advocating.

I note that Robin Harper has booked his holiday in Oban. I have booked my summer holiday in Sutherland, in my colleague Jamie Stone's constituency. I am looking forward to going there.

I often criticise the Executive for lodging unnecessary amendments to Opposition motions. Today, however, I want to criticise the Opposition parties for lodging unnecessary amendments. There is nothing wrong with the Executive motion. Given that all the comments that have been made today have been supportive of the motion, why do we have SNP and Conservative amendments to it? They are not helpful and their inclusion in today's business sends out the wrong message.

16:48

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): Before I make my speech, I declare that I have an interest in this debate.

I want to make it absolutely clear that the Conservative and Unionist Party welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to the eradication of this loathsome disease. I go further and acknowledge the part of the SNP amendment that recognises that that commitment comes not only from the Scottish Executive but from the Scottish Parliament. I should say, however, that it would have been helpful if the Executive's motion had referred to the goal of eradication of the disease.

Two major areas of this tragedy cause great concern and need to see considerable improvement if public sympathy with the policy of eradication is to continue. The silence at last week's announcement of a cull would have been even greater if we had realised that, one week further down the line, the cull would scarcely have begun. That delay, and the delay between the first suspicion of an outbreak and the slaughter and eventual disposal of livestock following confirmation of disease, verges on the unacceptable. One or two incidents have crossed that line and verge on the intolerable.

If the minister—or anybody else—doubts what I am saying, I can assure him that the people of Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire were distinctly unimpressed by a pile of rotting carcasses of sheep that were slaughtered last Sunday and the absence yesterday afternoon of any sign of wood with which to build the funeral pyre. That is not good enough. The Executive has the power to improve the situation. It must do so if political support for the process is to be maintained.

The second area of concern is best expressed by a farmer who lives close to me, at Parton in Galloway. Because of a contact with Longtown, he will lose his commercial flock and may well lose one of the most important pedigree flocks of blue-faced Leicester sheep in the country. He purchased 30 ewes in Longtown on 21 February. They have since been isolated. I quote from today's *Galloway News*, in which he says:

"All they say is I have been in an infected market ... The really annoying thing is that they have never come to test the sheep from Longtown. They sent two girls who looked at them."

Perhaps every cloud has a silver lining. He continued:

"They never made any inquiries about them to see if there was the right number ... they just asked where they were. The whole thing stinks – it's been handled terribly".

The stark message from that is that the Minister for Environment and Rural Development's department has got its communications wrong. Communication and information are slow, mixed and unproductive, although they are one of the key elements in this entirely unpalatable process.

Ross Finnie: I would be grateful if Alex Fergusson could clarify his position. Is he suggesting that, having established that every case of foot-and-mouth has come from the Longtown market, we should now delay our response by having to check out every flock with an absolute, concrete contact before we take any further action? If he is, he is going down a very dangerous road.

Alex Fergusson: I am not suggesting that for a minute. I am suggesting that the good words that

come from the Executive are not always being translated into action on the ground and that the people involved are not being informed of exactly what is facing them in the fastest possible way, as should be the case.

I do not aim criticism only at SERAD because, as we have heard today, the whole business world is in a state of confusion. The most obvious examples come from the tourism industry, where some contradictory messages are rapidly becoming the stuff of folklore.

All businesses in the south of Scotland, particularly in the south-west of Scotland, are suffering. Countless businesses are on the verge of closure. Many in Dumfries and Galloway will never reopen. They are by no means confined to tourism-related businesses. Urgent, revolutionary thinking is required, above and beyond the welcome announcements that have been made today.

I urge the Minister for Environment and Rural Development, the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and the Minister for Finance and Local Government to get their thinking caps on, to cut out the bureaucracy and red tape and to come to the assistance of rural Scotland in general—and of Dumfries and Galloway in particular. Rural people do not easily ask for help, but they have never needed it more.

We cannot support a motion that congratulates the Executive on future action. It smacks of an arrogance that, frankly, we have come to expect from the Executive. Nor can we fully condone the actions of an Executive that gave rise to a telephone call to me in which a farmer's wife complained, "They talk about taking out 200,000 sheep. On my neighbour's farm, they've made a mess of taking out 25."

We support the aim of eradicating the disease, but unless the Executive takes on board our constructive criticisms, there may not be much of a rural Scotland left to support. I commend the amendment in the name of my colleague, Alex Johnstone.

17:04

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): I start by paying tribute to everyone involved on the ground—largely in Dumfries in Galloway. Although not everything is perfect, the emergency organisation that Dumfries and Galloway Council has now had for some years and which has swung into action has ensured that many of the problems have been ironed out much more quickly than would otherwise have been the case. It is instructive to compare how differently the crisis has been handled in Dumfries and Galloway and by some

councils south of the border.

This has been a serious debate on a serious matter—although I thought Alex Johnstone gave us an unintentional insight into Conservative canvassing technique when he said that he is going to give up making random visits to farms.

In agricultural terms, the problem is still spreading. I understand that a case was confirmed today near New Abbey, in the Galloway and Upper Nithsdale constituency. That is very worrying. I presume that that case is not near any others. It was on the other side of the Nith from all the Dumfries cases and a considerable distance from the nearest outbreak. It is very worrying if the disease can spread in that way.

I know that all parties have—for good reasons—set their faces against vaccination, but I note that the Dutch have declared their intention to use ring vaccination followed by early slaughter of vaccinated animals. Will the minister say whether that is an option that remains in SERAD's armoury if matters get worse? I think, however, that that is an avenue that few members would like to go down.

I also ask whether anything can be done to speed up the testing process. There seems in some cases to be an inordinate delay between testing an animal and getting the final all-clear. I realise that that is sometimes because the first test is clear, but subsequent tests must be made. I understand that there is only one laboratory doing the tests. I stand to be corrected if I am wrong. Is there any possibility of using any continental laboratories to speed up the process?

I was in the House of Commons on Tuesday to hear Michael Meacher's statement on the subject. Although he did not speak of Scotland, his statement will obviously influence policy here. Although his statement was full of sympathy and offered plenty of encouragement, it contained damned little detail and precious little in the way of exact commitments. On VAT and taxes in particular, Mr Meacher said—as did Ross Finnie today, I think—that the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise had been asked, or instructed, to take a sympathetic approach. The problem is the potential gaps between how officers of those departments deal with individuals who, I presume, get their bills in the normal way, but who must then phone up to deal with the matter. I wonder whether more definite instructions can be given. Perhaps payment of bills can be postponed for a time, without the person who has been billed having to ask for that.

Michael Meacher said that local authorities have the power to defer rate payments. We know that they have that power; what is needed is an instruction to them to defer rate payments and a

statement by the Executive to the effect that it will compensate local authorities for any loss of interest and that it will help them if they have cash-flow problems.

Many of the people who are affected by the crisis are self-employed. Mr Meacher said that people who are self-employed may be eligible for jobseekers allowance, but most members will know that if applying for anything involves the Employment Agency and the Department of Social Security, bureaucracy is a constant problem. What instructions are being given to the Employment Agency to speed up the process and to make it simpler for people who have temporarily lost their entire livelihoods to get jobseekers allowance, despite that fact that they are not looking for a job because they already have one?

Several members have made points about the three areas into which the country has been divided. What are the implications for the infected area, which is, I presume, Dumfries and Galloway? I understand the reason for the designation of those three areas and I sympathise with it, but the problem might arise that there is a welcome improvement in tourism, for example, in areas 1 and 2, but that the prospects for area 3 become worse and that it becomes a no-go zone. We must be clear, when we talk about those three areas, that although Dumfries and Galloway is an infected area it is not off-limits for all kinds of business, particularly tourism business.

The minister said that he is able to develop, or that he is going to develop, consequential compensation. I am glad to hear that, because Michael Meacher never used those words. They have a precise meaning. Compensation is not the same as deferment. Compensation means payment for income that has been lost. I await with interest the details of what that will entail. I do not underestimate the minister's difficulties. The post office next to me in Crocketford is not a tourism business by most definitions, but a substantial part of its business comes from tourism. Of the remainder of its business, much comes from farms. Would that business qualify for relief under the minister's suggestion?

Finally, I say that we support much of what has been done, but the crisis is worsening. People need certainty. Many things are being considered, but we need to move from consideration to decision.

17:05

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison): As well as responding to points that have been made in this important debate, I will concentrate on the effect that the foot-and-mouth

outbreak is having on our tourism industry and provide further detail of the actions that the Executive is taking to help it to recover.

I am happy to advise Alex Johnstone that the National Trust for Scotland will make a public statement tomorrow, in which it hopes to be able to announce the phased reopening of some of its properties where it can be demonstrated that the risk of foot-and-mouth infection has been adequately addressed. In response to the specific point that he raised, I can say that National Trust for Scotland properties in urban settings in the south-west of Scotland can reopen.

I am grateful to Elaine Murray for her guidance and assistance during this awful episode. I was happy to meet her and other colleagues in Dumfries and Galloway on Friday. Wendy Alexander has said that she will examine the issue of lottery funding, which Elaine Murray raised.

Richard Lochhead made a point about our policy on animal movement and the position of auction marts. Our policy on animal movement is, of course, determined by veterinary advice. Mr Lochhead will appreciate that we take that advice very seriously.

I am also aware of the situation of the Aberdeen tourist office. I am due to meet leaders from Aberdeen shortly. I will be accompanied by the local member—and now my fellow minister—Lewis Macdonald, who will inform the meeting.

I agree with Maureen Macmillan that we have to emphasise at every opportunity that people can go into the countryside as long as they avoid contact with livestock. We have been reinforcing that message since the guidance was published on 7 March. On her point about tourism expenditure and the promotion of the Highlands and Islands, I guarantee that we will ensure that the Highlands and Islands, as well as other parts of Scotland, will be aggressively marketed as a tourist destination.

I agree with the important point that Fergus Ewing made that we should never allow people to pit farming against tourism. We should not allow anyone to divide those two important industries. However, I did not agree with his analysis of the content of one of my press releases earlier this week. I assure him that we liaised with Treasury colleagues. As Mr Finnie said in his opening speech, many of the measures that were announced by Michael Meacher on Tuesday will apply across the UK. I was delighted to meet Alasdair Morgan in London on Tuesday—at least one SNP MP is taking his responsibilities seriously.

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way?

Mr Morrison: If Richard Lochhead gives me a moment, I will explain what Michael Meacher said.

UK ministers have requested that the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise take a sympathetic approach to businesses that are experiencing financial problems as a result of the foot-and-mouth outbreak. That will involve the use of maximum flexibility to allow the deferral of the payment of taxes, national insurance contributions and VAT.

Richard Lochhead: I take the minister back to his comments on the restrictions on the movement of livestock. My reason for mentioning those restrictions related to the need for collection centres to be established to help smaller farms. What is the minister's policy on the establishment of such collection centres?

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before the minister responds, I will repeat the plea that I made last night. Those members who have just come in should listen to the minister winding up and not conduct conversations. A conversation is taking place involving a gentleman who has his back to me, and another is taking place in another part of the chamber. We will not continue until members sit down. Such conversations are most discourteous to the minister winding up and are happening too often.

Mr Morrison: I am advised that we will consider the issue that Mr Lochhead raised, as we are moving to a position in which there can be movement in the countryside. There is more latitude in the north of Scotland.

As many colleagues have said, tourism is a mainstay of the rural economy. Tourism impacts on a huge number of other businesses—when tourism suffers, so does the entire rural economy. The tourism industry in Dumfries and Galloway has been particularly badly hit. Last week, I met the chair and chief executive of Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board and around 20 tourist businesses.

I recognise the seriousness of the position in Dumfries and Galloway and I acknowledge that it is likely that the industry will take longer to recover there than in other parts of Scotland. During my visit to Dumfries and Galloway, I guaranteed additional support to help that area, and I have asked for that help to be provided immediately. It will take the form of new and targeted marketing campaigns, prepared in partnership with the local tourist board; visitscotland has also offered staff support to the board, if it would find that useful. My colleague Wendy Alexander will meet tourism and local enterprise company interests in Dumfries and Galloway when she visits the area on 2 April.

Mr Swinney: On the support that the minister will argue for in relation to individual tourism businesses, would he accept that it would help a number of those businesses if the Scottish

Executive were to lobby the Treasury to issue an instruction not that national insurance contributions should be deferred, but that there should be an amnesty—which is possible—for a given period, in order to protect the livelihood of those businesses? That would allow them to survive and to benefit from future marketing campaigns.

Mr Morrison: As Michael Meacher explained to the House of Commons last week, that is exactly what we are asking for. We are asking for a deferral of payments, which will greatly benefit tourism businesses and other businesses in all the affected areas.

On the important point of the perception of Britain abroad, I am happy to announce that, earlier this week, I spoke to the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Brian Wilson. I emphasised to him the need for our embassies and consulates to put out the true facts. He assured me that they are doing that and will continue to do so. I will, of course, continue to liaise with him.

I have also discussed with Janet Anderson, my colleague at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, how best the British Tourist Authority can help. It is in a unique position to do so, as it has offices in all the countries that are important to us. The BTA in London has provided, and is providing, guidance to all its overseas offices, based on the latest available information. Our objective is to minimise the long-term damage to Britain's image overseas as a tourism destination, so that full recovery is as speedy as possible. We all appreciate that foot-and-mouth disease is a UK problem, and the recovery measures must be on a UK level.

The United States is one of our most important overseas markets. I will be visiting New York during tartan week and will use my visit to emphasise that Britain and Scotland are open for business. I make a plea to public agencies in Scotland not to cancel their meetings and conferences but to go ahead and hold their meetings in rural hotels, paying attention, of course, to the advice applicable to the area.

We will ensure that everything possible is done to get over the message that Scotland remains open for business and that people are encouraged to come and holiday in Scotland.

I urge members to support the motion.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Euan Robson to move motion S1M-1769, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

The Deputy Minister for Parliament (Euan Robson): I move motion S1M-1769. [*Applause.*]

That the Parliament agrees that the following instruments be approved—

the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2001;

the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2001;

the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2001;

the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2001; and

the draft Limited Liability Partnerships (Scotland) Regulations 2001.

The Presiding Officer: I think that that counted as a maiden speech.

Decision Time

17:18

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): As a result of today's business, I have five questions to put. Again, I ask members to check that the light in front of their card is extinguished. In that way, all members will have been registered.

The first question is, that motion S1M-1766, in the name of Johann Lamont, on behalf of the Social Justice Committee, on the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's inquiry into drug misuse and deprived communities, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the content and recommendations of the 6th Report 2000 of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, *Inquiry into Drug Misuse and Deprived Communities*.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S1M-1771.2, in the name of Fergus Ewing, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1771, in the name of Ross Finnie, on rural Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)

Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 32, Against 87, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S1M-1771.1, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1771, in the name of Ross Finnie, on rural Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 21, Against 69, Abstentions 30.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S1M-1771, in the name of Ross Finnie, on rural Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)

MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 69, Against 20, Abstentions 31.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to rural areas, especially during and after the foot-and-mouth crisis; endorses the Executive's commitment to the eradication of the disease as essential for the long-term future of the rural economy, including tourism; endorses the provision of clear guidance on public access; welcomes the steps being taken to provide hardship relief, and supports the Executive's commitment to assist Scotland's vital rural communities and industries.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is that motion S1M-1769, in the name of Tom McCabe, on approval of statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the following instruments be approved—

the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2001;

the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2001;

the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2001;

the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2001; and

the draft Limited Liability Partnerships (Scotland) Regulations 2001.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I ask the advice of the chair on the protection of members in dealing with issues. I wrote to the Executive on a constituency matter and have just received, after nine months, an official correspondence as a reply. Is there any protection in standing orders for members in this situation?

The Presiding Officer: It is certainly not a matter for the chair.

Recycling in Fife

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We now come to the members' business debate, which is on motion S1M-1684, in the name of Iain Smith, on recycling in Fife. Members who are not waiting for the debate should please leave quickly and quietly so that we can proceed.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with disappointment that, according to the Accounts Commission Performance Indicators for 1999-2000 for the percentage of domestic waste recycled, Fife Council has fallen from 4th in 1996-97, when it inherited the award-winning record of the former North East Fife District Council, to bottom of the league in 1999-2000 at 1.6% and urges Fife Council to develop a strategy to increase recycling and meet its obligations under the European Landfill Directive.

17:24

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): I thank the Parliamentary Bureau for giving us the opportunity to debate the motion. I thank the members who supported it and those who have stayed to participate in the debate. I also welcome the minister to her new responsibilities.

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it within your power to impose an informal suspension of perhaps one to two minutes at the end of decision time so that the chamber can be properly cleared? That would allow members who are promoting their own business to do so in an atmosphere of calm and without this constant hubbub. It is not fair to Mr Smith or to anyone else who is interested in the debate.

The Presiding Officer: The answer to your question is yes, it would be possible. Patricia Ferguson yesterday pointed out to me that there had again been a great hubbub at the start of members' business. There is no reason why members cannot leave quickly and quietly—which is the phrase I use—but they insist on having conversations. I do not want to suspend the meeting because that simply delays everyone. Start again by all means, Mr Smith.

Iain Smith: I will not repeat what I have already said but, before anyone else says it, I will state that I will be talking rubbish.

I used to be proud of the part of the country where I live because it took rubbish seriously. Before the reorganisation of local government, North East Fife District Council was in the vanguard of recycling in Scotland. For more than a decade, under the control of the Liberal Democrats, improving the environment was a priority. We had rubbish-free zones and cleaner

beaches. We removed chlorofluorocarbons from redundant fridges. We encouraged, promoted and supported recycling. Door-to-door waste paper collections were carried out across the whole of rural north-east Fife. Civic amenity sites were situated throughout the district, from the smallest hamlets to the largest towns. They offered bottle banks, can banks, plastic bottle recycling and textile recycling. Other schemes were under development for recycling batteries and waste oils. There was also an experimental composting scheme, again with door-to-door collection.

Sadly, much of that work—and the considerable good will and active support of the public—was lost on reorganisation when responsibility was transferred to Fife Council. Even before Fife Council took over, it showed its commitment to the environment by refusing to allow North East Fife District Council to complete the purchase and development of a major civic amenity site and recycling centre for the biggest town in the district, St Andrews. When it took over in 1996, Fife Council abandoned the scheme altogether, even though the district council had transferred the money that had been earmarked for the scheme to the new council.

Fife Council subsequently scrapped the waste paper collection and composting schemes. For purely commercial reasons, it introduced large wheelie bins across Fife with no consideration of the wider environmental implications. I was a councillor at the time—perhaps I should have declared an interest—and I warned the council that, by introducing large wheelie bins, it would not promote recycling and waste minimisation, but just encourage people to chuck stuff in the bins. That is exactly what happened and the warning seemed all the more apt when the waste paper and composting services were withdrawn. I see that Bruce Crawford is looking a bit sceptical, but that is what happened.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP) *rose*—

Iain Smith: I will finish this point and then Bruce can come back if he wants.

I am not sure whether Fife Council called on the expertise of the press in raking through bins but, in a recent analysis of the contents of wheelie bins, it found that the typical contents were more than a third paper and card, more than a third putrescible organics—I apologise if I have not pronounced that correctly—and about 25 per cent glass, plastics and metals. In other words, less than 10 per cent of the waste in a Fife wheelie bin could not be recycled.

Fife Council, for purely economic reasons, developed a waste collection strategy that took no account of waste management, waste

minimisation or waste disposal. The predictable result is that Fife has gone from fourth position in the recycling league in 1996 to bottom in 2000. A massive 98.4 per cent of all household waste ends up in holes in the ground.

I recognise that Fife Council has now made a small start to recover the situation. It is considering experimental composting schemes and door-to-door waste paper collections in some areas. At least it is recycling some things, but that is a very small step, which goes hardly any way towards restoring previous levels, let alone meeting the requirements of the European landfill directive.

The problem is not unique to Fife. In the past five years, Scotland's recycling record has gone from bad to worse. The European landfill directive requires Scotland to reduce the proportion of waste that is sent to landfill sites by a quarter by 2006—not by a quarter of the current levels, but by a quarter of the baseline levels of 1995 for biodegradable waste. We have gone backwards, which means that, to reach the targets, we have more to do and further to go than we had in 1995-96.

In other countries, households have more than one bin at their disposal so that they can separate their rubbish in an environmentally conscious way. When we consider the record of other countries, our record becomes all the more embarrassing. The amount of waste that is recycled in Switzerland is 52 per cent. In the Netherlands and Austria, the figure is 45 per cent. In Scotland, it is 7 per cent. That is a national disgrace. In Canberra in Australia, people have succeeded in increasing the amount that they recycle from 8 per cent in 1995—our base position—to 57 per cent this year. The message is therefore clear: progress is possible.

We can surely learn from best practices that have been established in Scotland, in other parts of the UK and abroad. Why is so little glass recycled? Happily, the ancient tradition of getting 20p back—or 3d for people as old I am—for returning an Irn Bru bottle is still with us, but why do we not do more of that? Even the United States, the international pariah on environmental issues, has developed a bottle deposit scheme that extends beyond glass bottles to aluminium and other waste materials.

Clearly, the Executive could take a lead. An opportunity is there to be seized and, as an outward-looking nation, we should be learning from other countries, particularly those in the European Union, which, after all, will have to comply with the same landfill directive.

The Scottish Executive could also improve matters by publishing and enforcing targets for recycling. The partnership for government

commits the partnership Executive to setting targets for recycling in the public and private sectors and to promoting waste management strategies. The national waste management strategy has made progress. The requirement to develop area waste management plans under that strategy has at least forced councils such as Fife Council to take the issue seriously. However, I would welcome news from the minister on the progress that has been made to meet the European Union directive requirements. I hope that he will say how the Executive can ensure that there is a healthy market for recycled products. I believe that it could do so by leading by example and instructing the Scottish Executive secretariat to buy more recycled products.

Great strides forward could be taken on this issue. We have done it before. Through a combination of local initiatives, North East Fife District Council led the way in Scotland. Fife Council must resurrect more of those policies and go even further. I am confident that, with the environment now under the responsibility of a Liberal Democrat minister, we will begin to see progress on this and other environmental issues.

I welcome the opportunity to hold this debate and look forward to the reply from the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): At this point, five members have asked to speak, so speeches must be a maximum of four minutes, please. I call Scott Barrie, to be followed by Bruce Crawford.

17:31

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I did not realise that I would be called so early in the debate.

I welcome the debate, but I must take issue with a number of Iain Smith's comments. He said that unfortunately his constituents in North-East Fife seem to think that the provision of wheelie bins means that they have no environmental responsibility. Those of us who have lived in the west of Fife for a considerable time are used to wheelie bins and taking collections to bottle banks. In fact, I am sometimes embarrassed by the number of bottles that I deposit in the bottle bank in Pittencrieff park, known locally as the Glen, in Dunfermline. That might say something about my drinking habits; I am not sure. I hope that my newspaper collections are kept separate from my wheelie bin.

Iain Smith: Mr Barrie may not be aware that the figures that I cited on the contents of wheelie bins were from a study of wheelie bins in the west of Fife.

Scott Barrie: That is a point worth making, but I thought that Iain Smith's argument was that the poor people of North-East Fife did not know how to use their wheelie bins when those bins were introduced. I am sorry if I misunderstood what he said.

That little aside was said in no way to denigrate the important role that recycling should play. I am well aware of the statistic that Fife Council has fallen to the bottom of the recycling league. In fact, Councillor Drew Edward, the secretary to the Labour group, and I had a discussion about this issue late last year. I was appalled by what he told me, but I was slightly heartened by some of the action that Fife Council is taking.

As Mr Smith will know, the national waste strategy for Scotland, produced by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and endorsed by the Scottish Executive, identifies Fife as one of the 11 waste strategy areas in Scotland. Between now and the autumn, the councils in each area will be working with their key partners to produce waste area plans, which will identify local solutions to waste management problems, where appropriate, and provide a link to the management of the national waste strategy. That might be a small beginning, but it shows that Fife Council is aware of its environmental responsibilities and is trying to do something about them.

Mr Smith is being a bit disingenuous by giving the impression that the North East Fife District Council area was some sort of environmental nirvana before local government reorganisation. I point out to him that Kirkcaldy District Council and Dunfermline District Council, in conjunction with North East Fife District Council, won a national award for the kingdom compost initiative—the initiative was not solely down to North East Fife District Council.

I understand that one of the reasons why Fife Council has fallen so low in the national tables is that there were no markets for recycled glass and paper. Mr Smith mentioned economics a number of times. The fact is that the council has a duty to provide value for money and cannot simply do things because they happen to be environmentally good, desirable though they may be; it has to take into account the cost.

We are having a debate to criticise—perhaps rightly—Fife's recycling initiative. If the practices of the three former district councils had continued, we could easily have debated why value for money was not sought. The issue is not as straightforward as saying that the council is not doing enough. It is perhaps unfortunate that the council has fallen down the national table. It was unfortunate that the contracts were negotiated at a time that coincided with local government reorganisation. However, as I said, the council is

aware of the issue and is taking steps to deal with it. I hope that it will improve its environmental record.

17:35

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I congratulate Iain Smith on initiating the debate, although when I first heard about it, I thought that it might involve a policy for recycling Liberal business managers.

My constituency covers Fife, and I am the shadow environment minister, so I know the value of thinking globally but acting locally. It is fair to say that Fife's Labour council has not always thought of or acted in the best interests of the people. That is especially true for recycling. I hear what Scott Barrie says about improvements that have been undertaken, which are to be applauded. To be fair to Iain Smith, the north-east Fife Liberals did quite a good job of putting together the recycling packages there. It would be interesting to look furth of Fife and see the picture elsewhere.

It is right to say that the European Community's new directive on the landfill of waste will impact on our local councils. As a former council leader, I know how difficult it is for councils to balance the increasing pressures to invest in new waste management systems with the increasing landfill taxes that do not allow them the freedom to do that. The Accounts Commission report—Iain Smith is reading it right now—shows that SNP councils perform better than most, even in difficult circumstances.

In my years at Perth and Kinross District Council, we invested quite heavily in recycling. Perth and Kinross has wheelie bins, but it also has the best recycling record in Scotland. Therefore, recycling is less to do with wheelie bins, and more to do with the mechanisms that are in put in place behind them to support recycling. SNP-run Angus Council has also increased its recycling capacity year in, year out, as has Clackmannanshire Council. The only SNP council that is going the other way is Falkirk Council, but we have been in control there for only a few weeks. I am sure that that situation will be reversed in the coming years.

Reducing dependency on landfill has been one of the SNP's political priorities for many years. Our 1999 local government manifesto committed us to prioritising a reduction in the use of landfill sites and to adopting alternative strategies to deal with waste.

SEPA's national waste strategy has been introduced. It sets out a framework to shift fundamentally the way in which Scotland's waste is managed. I am glad that the new minister is listening to the debate. I say to her that I have

received feedback from local authorities and others involved that some of the local authorities that are involved in the national waste strategy are severely dragging their heels and are brought into the process with some difficulty. From the Executive's perspective, and perhaps that of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, work must be done to champion the cause and to bring on board the councils that are not so keen on the idea.

The landfill tax that the Tories introduced and which Gordon Brown has increased every year is making it difficult for local authorities to make the changes necessary to allow the principle of the six Rs to apply. In 1997, £23 million was paid in landfill tax. Today, it is estimated that we are paying about £40 million.

As with many other issues that the Scottish Parliament debates, surely the answer is that instead of sending that £40 million to Gordon Brown and the London Treasury, we should keep it here in Scotland, to be used by the Scottish Parliament, through the Executive. The revenues could be spent here on our recycling activities. They could help us to upgrade facilities and aid councils in meeting the exacting requirements of the European Union's landfill directive. They could also help councils to invest in new technologies, such as composting and segregated waste streams. In addition, we could consider the hypothecation of tax revenue. That is not SNP policy; it is my own thought.

The Presiding Officer is indicating that it is time for me to wind up, so I will do that.

Local councils need resources to invest in directing waste to solutions other than landfill. The problem is that the year-on-year settlements that local government gets do not make that easy. That goes for Fife Council and every other council in Scotland. It is a pity that other small nations can do it. The difference is that they have control of their own nation's resources. We do not.

17:40

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased that Iain Smith secured the debate. Recycling becomes ever more important to our efforts to reduce pollution and landfill as time goes on.

I had hoped to be able to praise Fife Council for making a start in resolving its abysmal record on recycling. However, I note that matters seem to be worsening, with the council coming bottom of the Scottish local authorities recycling league in 1999 to 2000.

I am sure that Iain Smith will want to claim some credit for the Liberal Democrats on recycling in

Fife. He can, of course, as Liberals are adept at recycling, as Bruce Crawford mentioned, particularly of deputy ministers. The best schemes to this day—at least, those that still exist—are from the North East Fife District Council area. However, I note that the best proportion of waste recycled in Fife—11 per cent—came in the last year of the previous Conservative Government. Since then, recycling has dropped to 1.6 per cent of Fife's waste.

Iain Smith must also accept some responsibility for the decline in performance as a former member and, I believe, leader of the opposition of Fife Council. Despite a very extensive trawl of council minutes, we have been unable to find any proposals from Mr Smith to address recycling issues.

Iain Smith: Will the member give way?

Mr Harding: No, I am sorry. Iain Smith had his opportunity. He should have made the most of it.

Like many other councils, Fife Council has been hit by the large drop in the value of the waste that is collected for recycling. As local government efficiencies hit home, the council cut back on recycling, as all other councils did, because it became cheaper to use landfill.

Fife Council can be proud that it has the lowest charge per household in Scotland for the collection of domestic waste. However, that has come at a price to the environment. I was shocked to learn that although the separated paper door-to-door collection was allowed to stay in place under the unitary authority—as Mr Smith will remember—people were being misled. In fact, the paper that was collected ended up in landfill. To the council's embarrassment, that point was highlighted in the local press.

Let us try to be constructive. Where do we go from here? It seems clear that the council must take steps to increase recycling on a low-cost basis. The obvious way in which to do that would be to increase the recycling facilities at sites to which people already take waste. There could also be an increase in the number of recycling bank facilities in Fife—currently, there are 131—at relatively low cost, through the creation of either new recycling collection sites or new civic amenity dumps, of which I am aware that there is a shortage. Initially, that could be targeted at communities where there is a strong demand for recycling, such as Dalgety Bay and St Andrews. Let us first encourage those who already want to be green, rather than investing in wider projects, at huge cost, that need a wider cultural change in order to be effective.

Mr Smith was right to say that North East Fife District Council made provision in its capital programme for an amenity site in St Andrews.

However, it was not legally committed and there were no funds. Having raised the issue with Fife Council, I am pleased to learn that it is now actively pursuing that initiative and is trying to identify a suitable site.

I understand that Fife Council now has a waste strategy group and is taking part in national waste strategy work. I wish the council's officials well, because they have a long way to go. If they are to be successful in diverting Fife's waste away from landfill, they must quickly increase cheap and effective recycling schemes with more recycling banks, increase the number of locally available civic amenity sites and concentrate on the areas where people want to recycle. If they do that, they can make a start and, we hope, pull themselves off the bottom of the league.

17:44

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I want to draw members' attention to what could be a severe problem over the next five to six years. In Europe and the United States, it is clear that successful strategies have been introduced to go down the road of intensive recycling: sorting rubbish at the source of collection, getting added value from that and then carrying on from there to recycling. Rubbish is worth £70 a tonne sorted and can be worth up to £700 a tonne once it has been recycled.

Under the SEPA plan, it was accepted that incineration—or waste to energy, as SEPA prefers to call it—was an option for local councils. Why? It is because it is the cheapest option. We will get our values severely wrong in future if we simply assign a monetary value to the way in which we deal with our rubbish. Incineration is a cheap option at the moment; it is not a cheap option in the long run. If we go down that road, we will be tying up capital for 25 years and encouraging people to produce rubbish to feed the incinerators, rather than minimising the rubbish that we create and sorting it sensibly.

A series of well-subsidised conferences, with glossy brochures, is being organised by big business—the people who want to build the dirty MRFs, or materials recovery facilities, and the incinerators. Councillors up and down the land are being heavily lobbied to go to those conferences and learn how cheap and efficient it will be for them to use that particular route for dealing with municipal waste.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Harper, the debate is Fife-specific. You can take the generalities and move them to the locality, but you must speak about Fife.

Robin Harper: I would like Iain Smith to tell me whether Fife is being lobbied in that way and is

taking that seriously, and whether Fife is considering building one of the so-called environmental parks. The total cost of an environmental park is £200 million, £140 million of which goes to the waste-to-energy plant and only £60 million to recycling. The balance in those parks is entirely wrong. I should be most concerned if Fife went down that road for dealing with its rubbish.

Iain Smith has been talking about recycling in Fife and what the Liberals were doing in the early days. That is the road that Fife—and, if I may say, the whole of Scotland—should be going down. We should go for intensive recycling and added value to municipal waste, and take advantage of all the new, small, local technologies, such as vermiculture and composting, that are being developed all over Scotland. Outwith Fife, there is Campbeltown Waste Watchers. There are all the ideas that are coming up through WECAN! in Fife, which is the association of many of Fife's Local Agenda 21 organisations. There are a huge number of ideas in Fife that could be used properly—I would like the Executive to encourage them.

17:48

Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I did not intend to speak in the debate, but when I heard the Fife MSP talk about wheelie bins in such a denigrating fashion, I felt I had to rise and defend the honourable wheelie bin, which has brought many positive aspects to life in Fife. There is less scavenging by dogs in Fife streets, less smell and more accessibility. The wheelie bin has also dramatically improved health and safety for workers since its introduction.

Iain Smith: Does the member accept that there are different sizes of wheelie bins? The problem to which I referred was the size of bin that Fife has adopted. If it had considered other options and other waste strategies, it might have adopted a more sensible solution, which would not allow people to throw all their rubbish into a big black bin.

Mr Kerr: We should not start reducing recycling in Fife to the colour of the council. It is more about culture, how we use the bins and the end product that we get out of the bins. Robin Harper identified some of those issues.

When I worked at Glasgow City Council, I prepared a leaflet for a door-to-door collection of waste paper. By the time the leaflet came back from the printers, the state of the market had changed from one where waste fetched £100 a tonne to one where people were charged £15 to have it taken away.

What we need to do, and what the Executive's

approach is designed to do, is underpin the markets for recycling and find other uses for those products. Indeed, new money was announced for that just last week. It is interesting that the market for green glass, which has always been a problem to get rid of, was always unsustainable and rose and fell dramatically. Now we have uses for glass in road products and in the building industry for cleaning buildings. There are different ways of using those products and, once we have dealt with the markets, recycling will increase.

I disagree fundamentally with the position on landfill tax. Every successful European country that has managed to recycle effectively has a massive landfill tax—sometimes double or treble the figure for the UK. To put it bluntly, that is the incentive to deal with the problem. When councils and businesses realise that they are going to be charged landfill tax, they will deal with the problems.

Bruce Crawford: Is not it true to say that, where those landfill taxes exist on the continent, most of that money is hypothecated to go back into such things as recycling and improving facilities, rather than being frittered away, as it is in this country?

Mr Kerr: I absolutely agree. If we choose to increase landfill tax, that must be considered. Unless we take a carrot-and-stick approach and put the money from landfill tax straight back into recycling, the benefit will be lost.

I realise that I have spoken for a little longer than I had intended, but I disagree with Robin Harper about the national waste strategy. Unless we have—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Fife, Fife, Fife, Mr Kerr.

Mr Kerr: I disagree with Robin Harper's attitude towards Fife's co-operation with other waste plan areas. Larger strategic issues have a role to play. We cannot afford to rule out certain proposed strategies, as they could solve wider problems. I am sure that businesses in Fife are beginning to realise the benefits of such strategies. Many of them are now going for ISO 14001 and are recycling more products.

Robin Harper: Does Mr Kerr accept that in Fife and other local authority areas the big business people have an unfair advantage because they have all the money to do the lobbying, and the intensive recycling route is not being lobbied for?

Mr Kerr: I disagree. Like Mr Harper, I get e-mails from organisations that propose a variety of solutions. I do not think that those organisations are slow in coming forward to present alternatives to big business. However, the organisations that come up with a solution that allows us to meet our targets are the organisations that will succeed. We

need to look across the board at all the solutions that are available. We must take a carrot-and-stick approach and allow resources to be spent where they are needed.

In Scotland, we start from a very low base. Historically, we favoured landfill, because we have a lot of land and we developed a reliance on it. That is now changing because of the landfill directive, but we will still need to landfill 30 per cent of Scotland's waste in some shape or form. We must ensure that landfill sites are highly engineered, highly controlled and highly monitored, that methane is extracted from them and that we get all possible benefits from them. However, we must not forget that we will still need landfill.

We have had an interesting wee run round the issues of Fife. I do not believe that the debate is about Fife Council and its colour. I believe that it is about the culture of Scotland and the need to change that culture and our approach to recycling.

17:53

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin): I start by thanking Iain Smith for welcoming me as the new Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development. I do not know whether members have twigged what the acronym for Minister for Environment and Rural Development is—it depends on one's French, I suppose. Anyway, members will no doubt be pleased to know that the Executive supports Iain Smith's motion.

Through the adoption of the national waste strategy, we are already urging every council in Scotland, including Fife Council, to develop a strategy to increase recycling and to meet the obligations of the landfill directive. We have also established a major new strategic waste fund to allow local authorities such as Fife Council to develop that strategy. The Executive recognises the increasing importance of sustainable waste management and welcomes the debate, which, although specifically focused on Fife, is relevant to all parts of Scotland.

The recent Accounts Commission for Scotland performance indicators may have shown Fife Council at the bottom of the league for recycling in Scotland. There were, however, several other councils that were not far behind that unenviable position. In fact, six others were reported as recycling less than 3 per cent. Unfortunately, the Accounts Commission for Scotland's figures do not reflect the effort that is being put into improving Scotland's waste management record. Fife, like other waste strategy areas, is working hard to develop a long-term solution to achieving sustainable waste management.

Some of the circumstances that led to Fife's drop in recycling rates have been discussed. A combination of local government reorganisation, unstable markets and lack of finance have all been cited. Important lessons must be learned from experiences such as those, but it is important to move forward and look to the future, and the future of waste management in Scotland looks healthier than it has before. A strategy, partnerships, market development and significant funding are all realities now.

The Executive adopted the "National Waste Strategy: Scotland" in 1999. It was prepared by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and is the definitive document that will transform the way in which Scotland deals with its waste. The main focus of the strategy at the moment is the development of the 11 area waste plans. The process is being co-ordinated by SEPA and involves the local authorities, the waste management industry, local enterprise companies, community recyclers and other interested parties.

The majority of area waste plans are currently at the stage of determining the best practicable environmental option for dealing with waste. In addition to that environmental assessment, each potential option will be assessed against economic, social and socioeconomic factors, as well as practicality. For members who are concerned—and Robin Harper articulated his concerns—that Scotland will jump from landfill dependency to the energy-from-waste route, please be reassured that all the options will be scrutinised carefully. Some energy-from-waste facilities may be required, but only as part of an integrated solution.

Robin Harper: Is guidance given to councils on what the Executive means by the best practical option?

Rhona Brankin: I could not quote Robin Harper the exact guidance, but I would be happy to find it for him.

We must ensure that each area waste group closely examines the range of options. I want to reassure Robin Harper, as he mentioned the possibility of moving very quickly to the energy-from-waste route. I share that concern, but we must consider energy-from-waste facilities as part of an integrated solution.

A major package of funding for waste management was announced in last year's spending review. A strategic waste fund worth £50.4 million will be available for local authorities—part of that will be for Fife—over the next three years for the implementation of area waste plans. Local authorities have been allocated almost £50 million extra grant-aided expenditure over three years for environmental services; it is

for them to decide how much of it they apply to waste management.

In addition, a further £3 million has been distributed this financial year to allow local authorities to increase their recycling and composting efforts. Many authorities will be able to show significant improvements in recycling rates in the immediate future as a result of that funding. Fife's allocation of £187,000 will be spent on an innovative central composting initiative as well as home composting, wastepaper collections and other recycling schemes.

The motion urges Fife to meet its obligations under the European landfill directive and Iain Smith asked about European targets. The main targets in the landfill directive apply to the reduction in biodegradable municipal waste that is going to landfill. The first of the targets has to be reached by 2010. By then, we will reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste in landfill to 75 per cent of its 1995 level and we will reduce it to 35 per cent of its 1995 level by 2020.

A system of tradeable permits is to be introduced to meet the targets. The design and operation of the permit system and the way in which the targets will be allocated are to be determined in a further consultation exercise.

Iain Smith also asked about market development. Finding an end use for recycled materials is often cited as one of the main barriers to recycling. The Executive is supporting both the ReMaDe Scotland programme and the UK-wide waste and resources action programme—known as WRAP—in a bid to overcome those barriers. The two programmes complement each other. ReMaDe Scotland is focused on providing local markets for local materials, whereas WRAP aims to address wider issues such as removing national and institutional barriers to recycling as well as developing reprocessing capacity in the UK.

Today's debate is a welcome contribution to raising the profile of an issue increasingly important in Scotland. Last month, there was a wide-ranging debate on sustainable development in Parliament, and many of the waste issues that were raised then have been reiterated by members today. Although Fife Council might have been singled out as a focus for raising the issues, it is clear that they are applicable to Scotland as a whole. Significant changes will occur in the way that Scotland deals with its waste over the next few years and, although many of them will not show results overnight, they will benefit our nation in years to come.

Waste management cannot be dealt with in isolation. We must work with local authorities, SEPA, the industry, the voluntary sector and non-governmental organisations. Waste awareness

and education will need to increase if we are to engage the public in the issues. Like myself, Robin Harper is a former teacher and knows the importance of raising these issues with young people. We must encourage people not just to recycle waste but to buy recycled as well, as that will create a demand for recycled products.

It is becoming more widely accepted that the move to sustainable waste management will be costly. Perhaps it is time that people realised that the cost of dealing with waste will have to increase. At the moment, the average household pays only £50 a year for collection and disposal; avoiding landfill will cost more.

However, members should be assured that the Scottish Executive is committed to the issue and is in for the long haul in assisting Fife—and every other local authority—to achieve waste management solutions fit for the 21st century.

Meeting closed at 18:02.

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