

# **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 31 January 2006

Session 2

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2006.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Licensing Division,  
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ  
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate  
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by Astron.

---

# CONTENTS

Tuesday 31 January 2006

Col.

<b>ITEM IN PRIVATE</b> .....	3245
<b>SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION</b> .....	3246
Road User Charging (Liability for Charges) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/651) .....	3246
Road User Charging (Penalty Charges) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/652) .....	3246
Road User Charging Schemes (Keeping of Accounts and Relevant Expenses) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/654) .....	3246
M77 (Malletsheugh) (Speed Limit) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/655) .....	3246
<b>LOCAL ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION AND REGISTRATION SERVICES (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1</b> .....	3247

---

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting 2006, Session 2

### CONVENER

\*Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

\*Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con)

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

\*Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)

\*Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

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

\*Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)

### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP)

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP)

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

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

Murray Tosh (West of Scotland) (Con)

\*attended

### THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Gordon Blair (Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland)

The Rev Graham Blount (Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office)

Neville Dundas (Scottish Borders Council)

Rod Richardson (Association of Electoral Administrators)

Janette Wilson (Scottish Churches Committee)

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Euan Donald

### LOCATION

Committee Room 4



## Scottish Parliament

### Local Government and Transport Committee

*Tuesday 31 January 2006*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:01*]

#### Item in Private

**The Convener (Bristow Muldoon):** I welcome committee members and members of the press and public to today's meeting of the Local Government and Transport Committee.

The first agenda item is consideration of whether to take in private the final agenda item, which is on our approach to the freight transport inquiry, including potential witnesses. Do members agree to consider that item in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Subordinate Legislation

### Road User Charging (Liability for Charges) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/651)

### Road User Charging (Penalty Charges) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/652)

### Road User Charging Schemes (Keeping of Accounts and Relevant Expenses) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/654)

14:01

**The Convener:** Agenda item 2 is subordinate legislation. To update members, I inform the committee that David Davidson has lodged motions to annul each set of road-user charging regulations. In light of that, and given that we normally invite the minister to address instruments if a motion to annul has been lodged, I propose that we consider the regulations at next week's committee meeting, which will keep us within the 40-day timescale.

I add that the three sets of regulations have been subject to misrepresentation in the media today. They do not relate in any way to the controversy about the Forth Estuary Transport Authority's proposals to increase tolls on the Forth road bridge.

The regulations will come before the committee next Tuesday.

### M77 (Malletsheugh) (Speed Limit) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/655)

**The Convener:** The Subordinate Legislation Committee has drawn the committee's attention to the regulations; its comments are contained in an annex to the paper on the regulations. However, no member of the committee has raised points on the regulations and no motion to annul has been lodged. On that basis, do members agree that we have nothing to report on the regulations?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

14:03

**The Convener:** The third agenda item is evidence taking on the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Bill. The first panel consists of one witness from Scottish Borders Council, who will address the bill's registration services aspect. I ask members to restrict their questions to that subject. I welcome Neville Dundas to the committee. We look forward to hearing his evidence. I ask him to make any introductory remarks, after which we will move to questions and answers.

**Neville Dundas (Scottish Borders Council):** I am pleased to be here this afternoon, but I would have been more pleased if my chief registrar had been with me—unfortunately, she is in hospital. I must point out that I speak not as a registrar or as somebody with great registration expertise, but as a manager of the local authority registration service. I speak specifically from the point of view of Scottish Borders Council, which might be in a slightly different situation from that of other councils. I am conscious that sitting behind me is a colleague from Clackmannanshire Council, who may have a slightly different take on some of the registration issues.

We have been pleased with the excellent consultation that has been undertaken on the bill. The General Register Office for Scotland and successive registrars general have gone to great lengths to involve registrars and local authorities in their thoughts on these matters; we feel that the consultation has been worth while. We are glad that they have taken account of some of the major concerns that we raised about the initial provisions, particularly in relation to Scottish Borders Council.

I am thinking of a provision that is not in the bill, but which concerns an administrative exercise that is to be carried out. It will mean that, although Scottish Borders is to become a single registration district, we will be able to retain, within that district, the names of what will become sub-districts. That is extremely important in the Borders context. To non-Borderers, it might seem a strange issue altogether, but it is important from the Borders point of view that people can retain links with their town of origin. If they are not able to do so, they are disqualified from becoming the main participant in common riding celebrations—the standard bearer, the cornet or whoever it happens to be. That is a key feature for us.

We were also anxious that losing the small district identifier would count against some of our efforts to improve, or work up, a big market for genealogy and family history. There is a great desire among people to return to their roots, which we hope to capitalise on in the future.

Aside from that, we are generally fairly happy with the proposals in the bill. If we have any concerns at all, they relate to the possible loss of revenue that could occur, for example, as a result of the proposal to issue free abbreviated extracts of death, rather than have people come to the registrar's office to purchase a full extract.

**Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** I will pick up on your point about the possible loss of income from supplying extracts. Might that be significant?

**Neville Dundas:** In terms of numbers, it might not seem significant, but in terms of income to the service, it is significant. We have 13 registration districts in the Borders. Two of them have full-time offices; the remaining 11 are part-time. In some cases, they operate for just a few hours a week. One service consists of a parlour registrar. If any of those offices, particularly the smaller ones, loses revenue, it is very noticeable, because of the small-scale operation that we conduct. The issue would be of some concern to us.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** I want to ask you about registration service staff and the bill's impact on their jobs, not only in terms of numbers but in terms of changes of role.

**Neville Dundas:** I hope that the roles of the registration staff will not be greatly affected. Effectively, we have operated as a single area—our districts do not cross borders. We have been quite self-contained, and we have managed to evolve the service so that it suits the area and the operation that we undertake. I do not think that the proposals in the bill would change that hugely.

The bill would make some things easier. Undoubtedly, it would be easier for members of the public who live across the border to register a death, for example, in Coldstream instead of having to go to Melrose or Galashiels. Several people from Cornhill-on-Tweed, which is on the other side of the Tweed, have relatives who use Borders general hospital. If one of their relatives dies there, the family has to go from Cornhill-on-Tweed right up to Galashiels to register the death. In future, they would be able to go just across the river to Coldstream to register the death. We see advantages in the bill, but I hope that there will not be a major change in the way that registrars operate.

**Dr Jackson:** Would the bill mean, for instance, that registrars would have to travel more to service the offices that you talked about? If they were

going to be there for a considerable time, would they have to do another job and multitask?

**Neville Dundas:** Our registrars occasionally travel quite extensively. Our structure allows several part-time registrars to travel so that they can cover for other registrars. They now also travel to perform civil marriages at venues outwith registration offices. They are accustomed to moving about quite a bit.

The amount of business is not likely to increase to the extent that it would be worth having people who could multitask in council offices that performed more than purely registration functions. That idea has been trailed but, from the registrars' side and from my side, I am not convinced that it would be the best way to operate.

**Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con):** Given that finance seems to be of some importance, does the council feel that the bill will not have any impact on its ability to recover fully any of the costs that are involved in registration services?

**Neville Dundas:** I am not sure that I am the best person to answer that. We endeavour to recover as much of our operating costs as we can, not only by using the set fees that the registrar general has set down, but by applying the discretionary fees for marriage ceremonies, for example. Those are set at a reasonable level, and allow us to cover our costs. However, the income that we get from any source does not entirely cover the basic cost of providing a registration service in the Borders.

**Mr Davidson:** Could you check that with whoever you think is the appropriate person and write to the committee with a full response, so that we know the council's position?

**Neville Dundas:** I am happy to do that.

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** You seem to have some difficulties with the idea of multitasking. Why?

**Neville Dundas:** The feeling has come through very strongly from registration staff that the service that they provide is very personal. Sometimes they provide it to people who are under extreme emotional stress. They are able to offer the service in a way that takes account of those people's needs and in the best possible surroundings in which to perform what can be quite painful registration operations. Staff are concerned that they could be in an office in which someone is collecting council house rent, council tax payments or district court fines when the next person in the queue is waiting to register a stillbirth. That is hardly conducive to the sort of personal service we want to provide.

14:15

**Paul Martin:** That dealt effectively with my question. There might be an argument, though, for accommodation and resources to be shared with other council functions, particularly in rural areas. Could there be such sharing? The registrar could have their own identity within a building to prevent the anomaly that you referred to.

**Neville Dundas:** Most of our office facilities are in buildings in which other Scottish Borders Council functions are carried out. The buildings and the space exist; it is just a case of providing the service in the way that we think is best for the customers. There will be areas in Scotland in which multitasking is undertaken, because there is a specialised office that is designed to cope with different aspects. However, we feel that what we currently do offers the best service.

**The Convener:** You said in your introductory remarks that you would be able to have sub-districts that would recognise original place names. Scottish Borders Council in particular was concerned about that issue. For clarification, are you satisfied that you will have the flexibility to allow people to register in places where they have traditionally registered?

**Neville Dundas:** Yes. Following discussions with the registrar general, we are happy that we will be able to make an entry for Scottish Borders district Kelso or Selkirk, for example, which will maintain the identification of those places and therefore satisfy the needs of people in the Borders.

**The Convener:** Would categorising the records in that way present any administrative difficulties for someone searching them in the future?

**Neville Dundas:** No. Indeed, it would be better that way than, for example, having as an identifier a number that would be meaningless to an outsider.

**The Convener:** Okay. We have no further questions, so I thank you for your evidence, which has been clear and concise.

The witnesses on our second panel represent the Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland—SOLAR—and the Association of Electoral Administrators. They will address primarily the electoral administration aspects of the bill, so I ask members to restrict their questions to those aspects. I welcome Gordon Blair, the chief legal officer of West Lothian Council, who is well known to me from my time as a councillor in West Lothian and, indeed, as a returning officer in many of the elections in which I have participated. I also welcome Rod Richardson, the principal administration officer in Clackmannanshire Council. He represents the Association of Electoral Administrators.

Gentlemen, do you want to make introductory remarks?

**Gordon Blair (Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland):** I thank the convener and the committee for inviting SOLAR and others to give evidence.

As committee members will have seen from our written submission, SOLAR welcomes the bill because it maximises the similarity between the local government election rules and other election rules and so minimises confusion for everybody, whether electoral administrators or candidates and agents.

I suppose that we have two general concerns. The main one is about the timing of the bill. Now that the calendar year has turned, we are in pre-planning mode, deciding what we can do in 2006. As members will know, we must produce primary and secondary legislation both at Westminster, on reserved matters such as registration, and at this Parliament, on the conduct of local government elections. It will probably be autumn before the chain of events becomes clear, we know where we stand and we can plan with any certainty what we are being asked to deliver for 2007. Timing is of the essence.

Picking out one or two of the more salient points from the detailed comments in our submission, we feel that performance standards for returning officers—which are not set out in the bill but will be set by Scottish ministers—must be relevant to their responsibilities, which centre primarily on conducting elections in accordance with election rules and not on the major issue of turnout. We also feel that they should be compatible with the standards that the Electoral Commission will produce for the Scottish Parliament and Westminster elections.

On the correction of errors, we suggest that returning officers should be given the additional power to correct errors that cannot really be corrected properly that have clearly been made by them or their staff. We understand that such a proposal was the subject of an amendment to the Electoral Administration Bill at Westminster that was defeated, so it has obviously not found favour down south. That said, we feel that it would cover the situation in which for some—usually inexplicable—reason a presiding officer writes the elector's number on a ballot paper instead of on the counterfoil. As any seasoned campaigner knows, such votes are knocked out during the count because the voter can be identified. If the returning officer is in a position to say that a presiding officer has made a mistake—or, indeed, mistakes, because usually there are, unfortunately, more than one at a time—they should have the power to declare that the votes are valid. I am not suggesting that the returning

officer should correct the error simply by scoring out the number, because no one other than the elector should touch the ballot paper.

We welcome the proposal that returning officers should mark the list of postal voters and postal proxies to show who has returned their postal votes. However, we are concerned about the logistics of such a move. It would be a considerable manual job, so it will need to be done electronically and we must get the technology right before such a measure is introduced.

On a not-so-technical point, about observers, the bill proposes to introduce observers at both the issuing and the opening of postal votes as well as at other proceedings. As candidates in Scottish Parliament elections know, candidates and agents are currently entitled to attend only the opening of postal votes. We question the logic of the proposal. Is it really what the Executive intends? We suggest that everything should tie in to the opening of postal votes, not to their issue.

We welcome the concept of personal identifiers, because it will improve security. However, the proposal needs to be piloted to examine the collection of the indicators by registration officers and how those indicators are used by presiding officers at polling stations. For example, how do we get the information from the electoral registration officer's database to the presiding officers to take the personal indicators of the voter who has signed for a paper?

We do not think that it is logical to extend provisions on tendered votes to the two categories proposed in the bill for the simple reason that such votes are never counted and remain sealed for ever unless an election petition is successful. SOLAR's view is that such a proposal raises false hopes among the voters who receive a tendered ballot paper that something will be done with such a vote. Of course, nothing can be done with it.

The final two points in our submission, on the review of polling places and the date for a new poll if a candidate dies before the election result is declared, relate not really to this bill or Parliament but to Westminster. We hope that Westminster will take up that issue and the rule that says that the Scottish ministers would fix a fresh date for the poll if a candidate dies, which should be picked up in any revised version of the Scottish local government election rules.

There are many technical points—from our point of view, the bill is primarily technical. We welcome much of the bill, but we have picked up some fine drafting points that, we hope, the committee finds helpful.

**The Convener:** I will start off with a question about the 2007 elections. You acknowledge the short timescale between the passage of this bill



and the parallel bill at Westminster and the preparations that you must make for the 2007 elections. Will the timescale present any returning officers with overwhelming problems in preparing for holding the Scottish parliamentary elections and the first-ever local government elections under the single transferable vote system on the same day?

**Gordon Blair:** No, any problems will not be overwhelming. I state that on the basis that we have always managed to achieve what has been asked of us. The difference this time is that we will have to make many more assumptions before the ink is dry on many of the policy decisions and the bill.

For example, the first major outstanding issue at the moment is the ward boundaries. I understand that the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland will feed its final recommendations to the Scottish ministers progressively from now until August. If a returning officer happens to be in a council area that receives the ward boundaries in, for example, May or June and waits until then to review their polling district boundaries, they will run out of time. We will start work on the assumption that the boundaries are as the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland has provisionally proposed. *[Interruption.]*

**The Convener:** We will suspend the meeting until we have sound again.

14:27

*Meeting suspended.*

14:38

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** We have our sound back. We were in the middle of a response from Gordon Blair on the challenges that returning officers face as a result of late changes to electoral administration and the forthcoming election.

I am sorry about the disruption, Gordon. Try your best to continue where you left off.

**Gordon Blair:** I was saying that, in our pre-planning for the elections, we must make a number of assumptions, one of which is that the boundaries for the new wards will follow the provisional proposals of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland. Another assumption is that the bill will be passed in time; we have to assume that some of the policy proposals that require legislation will have been passed and delivered. The boundary commission's final recommendations will go to the Scottish ministers this August and I understand that the deadline for statutory instruments to effect the ward boundaries is this December.

The other assumption that we have to make is that the elections will not be decoupled—that is, that the Scottish Parliament and council elections will remain on the same day—although the Arbuthnott report has just recommended the contrary. We are not making any assumption that the count will be manual, because we assume that the feasibility testing of e-counting will come to a successful conclusion. However, I understand that we will not know that until April or early May.

**The Convener:** I want to ask a couple of questions about that before I bring in other colleagues.

Do you require any amendments to legislation to enable you to introduce the electronic counting of votes, or does existing legislation give you the authority to count votes by electronic means?

**Gordon Blair:** The answer is yes, it needs legislative provision, and I think that it will be in the new Scottish local government elections rules, where the current rules about counting votes are to be found. Those rules will be laid before the Parliament in due course.

**The Convener:** As you will be aware from your experience as a returning officer, at a count, the existing practice among political parties is to sample the votes that have been cast so that they can assess their level of support area by area. Political parties find that information useful in future campaigns. Does SOLAR have a view on what degree of information from an electronic count, if any, should be made available to political parties, so that vote levels can be assessed district by district, while preserving the anonymity of individual voters?

**Gordon Blair:** SOLAR does not have a position on that, but my personal view is that the e-counting process must be transparent and must provide the same information as is currently available to allow political parties to engage with the electorate. What information is available is one issue that will need to be considered in the detailed rules for e-counting. I hope that the first stage of an STV count will be displayed, which will show everyone the first preference votes. The extent to which that will be displayed, in polling stations or in polling place areas, remains to be seen, but that kind of transparency will need to be considered. With an e-counting process, there is no technical reason that I am aware of that would prevent that kind of detailed information from being given.

**The Convener:** Before I bring in other members, I have a question about what will happen if we do not have electronic counting and we stay with the traditional manual counting of votes. I am aware that many returning officers have raised concerns about the length of time that

would be required, particularly for an STV count, if we were to continue with manual counting. What would your recommendations be for conducting those counts? Should the Scottish Parliament count continue to be done overnight or should it be delayed until the next day, and should local authority counts be spread over several days?

**Gordon Blair:** Again, I do not think that SOLAR has a position on that. My personal view, based on experience in my area, is that I would prefer the Scottish Parliament votes to be counted on the night and the STV council votes to be counted during the day. Of course, I am not dealing with the regional returning officers' duties, and they will have the list MSP results to declare as well. I am fortunate in that I have not, as yet, encountered any problems in recruiting enumerators, but I know that other colleagues do have such problems. I suspect that you will not get a universal answer to the question, and Rod Richardson may well have a different take on it because of the logistics with which he is familiar.

**Rod Richardson (Association of Electoral Administrators):** That is certainly the case. Like Gordon Blair, my staff look after only one constituency, and we do not have to concern ourselves with the regional count. The list vote count takes a considerable amount of time overnight and it is a long day for staff. In the past, we have had staff working continuously for up to 36 hours, and their concentration and their ability to make key decisions will obviously suffer as a result. However, the suggestion that counts should be held during the day causes us other concerns, so I agree with Gordon Blair that there is no straight answer to the question.

Our concern is that recruitment of staff could become an issue. Clackmannanshire is a small area with a small council staff complement. In some areas, it is considered inappropriate continually to populate the count with staff from the council, and we employ a considerable number of people from the community—the unemployed and others. However, we need to be careful about their abilities. With an STV system, ability becomes even more critical, because everyone who counts a ballot paper will have to make a decision that they currently do not have to make. At the moment, we rely considerably on professional staff from institutions such as banks and building societies. If votes were counted during the day, those people would not be available to us, so we would have severe recruiting problems. I know that similar problems would arise in constituencies throughout Scotland.

14:45

**Mr Davidson:** Are you making a formal or an informal suggestion that, from a manpower

perspective, there would be merit in decoupling both parliamentary election systems from the council election system?

**Rod Richardson:** The Association of Electoral Administrators has considered that issue since 1999 and people have had mixed views. From the previous serious debate on the issue, I recollect that the recommendation was to decouple. It has been recognised that the complexity for the voter in the polling station is perhaps not as significant as some parties make it out to be and that there may be an advantage in voters being exposed to both elections at the same time. However, on the administrative side, serious concerns have been expressed about the continuation of the principle of overnight counting, accuracy and staff's ability to deliver as a result of their continuous working hours.

**Gordon Blair:** SOLAR's view is that the elections should be decoupled not only because of the logistics that are involved—to which Rod Richardson referred—but because, with three different electoral voting systems and three different ballot papers, there is potential for at least some voters to be confused and to mark their papers incorrectly. Some academic research has been done on other elections in which an STV system that involves people putting 1, 2, 3 or 4 on their ballot paper is combined with a system in which one cross is put on the ballot paper. I understand that that tends to diminish the possibility of papers being made void as a result of being filled in incorrectly. However, SOLAR's experience is that that remains a potentially significant area for our members, particularly for council elections. When there have been dead-heats in elections in the past, every vote has counted. I suspect that every vote would count under STV and that any vote that is rendered void as a result of the ballot paper having been incorrectly filled in could affect the result of the election more significantly than it would have done before. Decoupling would cut through that.

**Mr Davidson:** You spoke earlier about performance standards for returning officers. Should I take it from what you have both said about decoupling and manpower that you have concerns about performance standards and about focusing on how many bodies come through the door rather than accuracy?

**Gordon Blair:** We do not have concerns about the principle of performance standards—indeed, everything else that we do is subject to performance standards, best-value audits and so on; the concern is that performance standards will be introduced that do not relate to the responsibilities of returning officers, for whom the bottom line is to have the relevant number of persons elected in accordance with the election

rules. We are concerned that performance standards might stray into areas that are more to do with turnout. It should be remembered that returning officers' areas of responsibility touch at the margins of turnout, but do not go to the heart of it. Obviously, that issue will arise in the consultation process.

**Mr Davidson:** Would you both prefer the issue to be dealt with by affirmative instrument, so that there is scrutiny by a parliamentary committee?

**Rod Richardson:** Are you referring to performance standards?

**Mr Davidson:** Yes.

**Rod Richardson:** The Association of Electoral Administrators is concerned about performance standards in general. Everyone accepts that we need to justify what we do quantitatively and show that we provide value for money and quality of product—Gordon Blair mentioned that. However, I reiterate his point: we should measure matters that are fully under returning officers' control.

One concern that has perhaps not been touched on is the cost to returning officers. It has long been recognised that local councils subsidise national elections considerably by using their staff and performing activities on returning officers' behalf. The budget for the Electoral Commission, which is setting the national framework for standards, has grown by a factor of four or five in the past five years, whereas the resources that are available to councils to support such activity have certainly not grown—I suggest that they have shrunk slightly. Concern must be felt about returning officers' ability to devote resources to achieving a standard. There is much flexibility at the moment. At some point, comparisons of returning officers' activities throughout Scotland will be made, in league tables or whatever they may be called. Whether that information is compiled through the Parliament or through the Electoral Commission does not make much difference.

**Mr Davidson:** Mr Blair comments on validity in section 3 of SOLAR's submission. Will you be more specific about what could be done to deal with errors such as identification numbers or whatever being transferred across? Could any mechanism eliminate the difficulty, if it were the result of a genuine error?

**Gordon Blair:** I suppose that the risk of that error happening is lessened, because the proposal is to abolish counterfoils. Presiding officers will not be able to put numbers on counterfoils erroneously, because there will be no counterfoils. However, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a presiding officer who thought that they had to write the electoral number on something, because they had always done so in the past, would put the number on the ballot paper. I am

sure that a feature of most returning officers' training is ensuring that presiding officers do nothing that invalidates the vote, but no fail-safe mechanism will prevent that completely.

**Rod Richardson:** I have had the good fortune to be involved in elections overseas and to see how different systems work. One issue that arises not infrequently is that when ballot papers are unstamped, the returning officer has no option but to reject them, in accordance with the regulations. When we have set up elections with a lot more freedom, the principles behind authenticating a ballot paper have come into play. The intention is to prevent counterfeit or otherwise improper ballot papers from being introduced into the system and to balance what has been issued with what is in the ballot box. For example, one methodology that we have used is to say that if the number of ballot papers in the ballot box is no greater than the number that was issued at the polling station, the papers will be accepted, whether or not they are stamped.

I suggest that, with some protection, returning officers could be given greater discretion to deal with unexpected and unanticipated errors that possibly could not have been covered in training because nobody ever thought that they would happen. Something needs to happen to stop people being disfranchised—we are all trying to achieve that.

**Mr Davidson:** In your experience, what percentage of people are disfranchised as a result of such errors?

**Rod Richardson:** Unstamped ballot papers are encountered relatively infrequently. I can speak only from my experience. I applaud my polling staff when we have a nil rejection rate. At the previous election, we had seven unstamped papers in a constituency. That is not a huge number but, as Gordon Blair mentioned, when we come to implement STV, under which we will deal with smaller numbers of ballot papers with much closer margins in a different format, seven could make a heck of a difference.

**Paul Martin:** On decoupling, do you accept that similar concerns were raised before the 1999 elections about some of the difficulties that would arise from the list system? I remember that some people were concerned that there would be chaos because we were issuing voters with three ballot papers. I am not an advocate of STV, but voters will still be issued with three ballot papers, not more, and there might be a reduction in the number of candidates. It will be difficult, but surely the issue can be dealt with.

**Rod Richardson:** I think that Gordon Blair stated earlier that we have always delivered. However, we have not always delivered at no cost

and the cost has sometimes been to the health and family life of the staff whom we use to deal with the elections.

As I said, we sometimes do not give voters credit for their ability to understand and use the systems that we put in front of them in the polling station. However, in a constituency election that I experienced in Northern Ireland, there was a 6 per cent rejection rate because voters marked their ballot papers wrongly. They were dealing with one ballot paper only under STV and were asked to mark it 1, 2, 3 and 4, but there were papers with crosses on and some with letters on—there were all sorts of things. That happened in an area in which STV has been used for 30 years. I suggest that, regardless of what we do, there will be a considerable number of rejected ballot papers in the first one or two STV elections in Scotland. That will be increased across the other two ballots if the elections continue to be held on the same day.

**Paul Martin:** You mentioned a rejection rate of 6 per cent. Are you arguing that if we do not decouple the elections but continue to hold them on the same day, the rejection rate will be more than 6 per cent?

**Rod Richardson:** I am suggesting that that 6 per cent would spread across the three ballot papers. There would be additional confusion about whether all three papers should be marked 1, 2 and 3 and I suspect that we would get crossover contamination.

**Paul Martin:** Has SOLAR quantified the cost? There would obviously be costs to holding the elections on two separate days. What would the cost be of running a public information exercise for the elections if they are held on the same day as opposed to the cost of holding the elections on separate days?

**Rod Richardson:** I do not speak for SOLAR; I speak for the Association of Electoral Administrators. I do not think that the cost has been quantified, although Gordon Blair might correct me. Obviously, holding the elections on the same day provides economies of scale, which would be lost if the elections were decoupled. We could not argue against that, but the counterargument is one of setting risk against cost. How much is reducing the risk of rejected papers worth?

**Gordon Blair:** SOLAR has not done any exercise on the increased costs of decoupling. The crucial point is whether an error rate of 6 per cent would affect the election result significantly. It would have a significant impact on a council election that was held under STV, although it would have less of an impact on the Scottish Parliament election because we are dealing with bigger constituencies. It is a question of balancing

the extra costs of decoupling against the effect on the democratic results.

**Paul Martin:** In the Northern Ireland election that Rod Richardson mentioned, were the 6 per cent rejected papers all spoiled papers? Was a distinction made between spoiled papers and mistakenly marked papers? Some people deliberately spoil their papers.

**Rod Richardson:** The rejected papers had not been deliberately spoiled although, within the 6 per cent, a number of papers were totally unmarked.

**Paul Martin:** So there will be protest votes within the 6 per cent.

**Rod Richardson:** Absolutely.

**Paul Martin:** Is there no way of quantifying the proportion of protest votes?

**Rod Richardson:** No, they are not separated out. The vast majority of the rejected papers in that Northern Ireland election were marked with multiple crosses rather than with a ranking order.

15:00

**Paul Martin:** With the will and the resources, can we deliver both elections on 6 May 2007? Obviously, as was the case prior to the 1999 elections, there will be challenges attached to that task. The committee heard evidence about an election in Australia in which there were 256 candidates—the tablecloth election. We do not have that kind of challenge here. When we consider the examples from throughout the world, surely we can deliver the elections on the same day as long as good public information is provided.

**Rod Richardson:** I would like to say that anything is possible. Almost anything is possible—certainly with advances in technology. If we introduced electronic counting, that would make a massive difference at the back end of the process. There are already moves to start to consider the education process for electors.

**Paul Martin:** I understand Mr Blair's point of view when he says that it is not the job of the returning officer to increase turnout. However, does he accept that the location of polling stations is a crucial issue that returning officers must consider? More work must be done to ensure that we consider polling stations as a crucial element of turnout. We should focus not on locating polling stations in the local supermarket but on making them more accessible and being more flexible about where they can be located.

**Gordon Blair:** The designation of polling places is for the local authority. You are right that that is one issue that impacts on accessibility to the voter. A lot of work is done to make polling places

as accessible as possible and to sub-divide polling districts as much as possible to create more polling places. That is why we need the change to be made in the United Kingdom bill so that a ward is not one polling district.

**The Convener:** Before I bring in Andrew Arbuckle, I will come in on some of the issues that Paul Martin raised about spoiled papers or papers that are ruled out because of the way in which the voter has filled them in.

I have two points. I am interested in Rod Richardson's experience of seeing up to 6 per cent of papers being rejected in Northern Ireland. My recollection from our consideration of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill is that the proportion of rejected papers in Northern Ireland was considerably lower than 6 per cent—I think that it was 2 per cent at most. What elections is he talking about?

Secondly, on trying to ensure that voters' intentions are recognised, could guidance be given to returning officers so that if, for example, a voter in the STV election puts one cross on the paper and leaves it at that, that would be regarded as a positive vote for the candidate or a first vote for the candidate? I appreciate that it could not be treated as a vote if there were multiple crosses. Similarly, if someone put a number 1 against a candidate on the first-past-the-post ballot, would that be regarded as a positive vote for that candidate? Can we provide guidance to ensure that there is consistency? What can we do to ensure that we maximise the recognition of voters' genuine choices?

**Rod Richardson:** On your first point, I was referring to the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in 2003. I had the opportunity to be involved with only one constituency. I do not know whether, as was suggested earlier, what we saw was the result of a huge protest vote. I accept that 6 per cent may have been above average, but I have to say that it shocked me.

On your second point, consistency is vital. Any returning officer who is currently presented with a ballot paper that has a tick on it instead of a cross, or a number 1 and nothing else instead of a cross, would accept it. Our job is to try to give effect to people's choices, not to find ways to disregard them. Certainly, as we are moving into a new era in which multiple marks on a ballot paper are being counted, there will need to be guidance on which the returning officers can rely on and apply consistently.

**Gordon Blair:** The Electoral Commission will no doubt give guidance to returning officers for the Scottish Parliament elections, which are within its remit. Technically, council elections in Scotland are not within the Electoral Commission's remit,

but it could be invited to give guidance to returning officers in council elections on what is a good or bad ballot paper. The net result is that there should be guidance.

**Mr Arbuckle:** The Association of Electoral Administrators states that the changes in relation to candidates' election expenses "should alleviate the confusion". SOLAR states that the changes

"go a considerable way towards clarifying various areas of uncertainty".

Neither of those statements could be called a ringing endorsement. As we are going to the bother of bringing in a new bill, can you give us any suggestions about how it could be improved?

**Rod Richardson:** At present, returning officers have only limited involvement with candidates' expense returns. The returns are not something on which returning officers must advise and guide candidates; the officers simply receive the returns and make them available for inspection. However, it is not uncommon for returning officers to be asked for guidance—personally, I always preface such guidance by saying that if somebody wants proper legal advice, they should go and buy it, but I try to be helpful.

At present, the requirements are confusing. The layout of the forms is confusing and the information on how to report back is frequently misinterpreted. The association believes that the proposed changes are a major step toward alleviating the confusion. The measures will grant scope to rework the presentation of the forms without diminishing the quality of what is presented. Speaking personally and on behalf of the association, I see the changes as providing clarification for candidates and agents rather than for returning officers.

**Gordon Blair:** The bill will provide for Scottish local council elections what the UK bill will provide for all other types of elections. That will introduce consistency for political parties on the rules for candidates' election expenses. That is a good thing, because there is nothing more confusing than the situation that we have had in the past of having rules for Scottish council elections that are different from those for other elections. That is a recipe for confusion.

**Mr Arbuckle:** If we go down that line, we are perhaps failing to get the best that we can get.

**Gordon Blair:** That may be a question to put to the UK Parliament.

**The Convener:** That brings us to the end of our questions. I thank Gordon Blair and Rod Richardson for their evidence.

**Rod Richardson:** Convener, I have a couple of points that I have not had the opportunity to make.

**The Convener:** If you wish to make other key points, we would welcome them.

**Rod Richardson:** I will do my best not to stray into anything that Gordon Blair has said or which has been discussed at length.

Sections 4 to 6 contain provisions on access to documentation and the compilation of lists of postal vote returns. It appears that there will be some discretion as to when in the process the lists are compiled. That is a vital issue. SOLAR and our association have suggested that compiling the lists when postal votes are opened and processed would be a risk to the secrecy of the election by making it possible to trace voting preferences back to individuals. It would also make the process extremely difficult procedurally. One method that has been applied elsewhere is to record returns when the envelopes are received. The method has limitations, because it shows that something has been received, but not what has been received. In a poll with three ballot papers, until the envelopes are opened and processed, there is no indication as to how many ballot papers have been returned, but at least we know that something has been returned.

New technology allows returning officers to interact differently with postal voters. I reiterate Gordon Blair's comment that the process must be supported by technology. There is sometimes concern about whether postal votes have been returned. If the list was compiled daily, as the returns were received, it would be possible to confirm for voters whether or not their ballot papers had been received. That would also assist at the later stages of the polling exercise if concern arose over missing ballot papers. There would be an advantage in that. I am suggesting that the timing makes a crucial difference.

Section 9 deals with the code of practice for observers. That code has to be developed at a later stage. Certainly, the association would welcome full consultation on that. Getting a firm understanding of the reasons for refusing observer requests will be critical. The returning officer will need to be clear on the grounds for refusal, such as safety and availability of space in the count hall. If it is not practicable to respond to all requests, he will have to know how he might deal with having to allow some people to observe and not others.

The timing of the introduction of what has been suggested is important in relation to the 2007 elections. Gordon Blair touched on that and I think that the point has been well made in that regard.

The financial memorandum indicates that no further finance will be made available in relation to the bill and that there will be no additional cost to authorities in running the elections. I question that. In December, the Department for Constitutional

Affairs stated that £19.2 million had been made available to English authorities to cope with the effects of the UK bill on this year's elections south of the border. Obviously, therefore, there are costs involved in that process. I accept that some of them relate purely to the UK part of the issue rather than to what is being dealt with in the bill that is before us. However, the point that was being made in the financial memorandum is that, because the elections are combined, the costs become hidden and cannot be quantified easily. We fully accept that quantifying them is difficult. However, the Scotland Office has always been clear about how the returning officer's costs should be allocated. Much of the cost is split on a 50:50 basis and much of it is split on a two thirds:one third basis, depending on the activity. I challenge the suggestion that authorities will be able to monitor the new system at no additional cost.

**Mr Davidson:** Could your association send us a single page or so outlining exactly what your queries about the cost are? You have obviously spoken to your English colleagues and know what things they have been given more money for, so could you tell us what things you think you will need more money to deal with?

**Rod Richardson:** We can certainly do that.

**The Convener:** I thank Gordon Blair and Rod Richardson for attending the committee.

On our third panel of witnesses we have Janette Wilson, the solicitor to the Church of Scotland and the Rev Graham Blount of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office. I ask members to bear in mind when asking questions that the witnesses are here to address the part of the bill that deals with registration services rather than the part that deals with electoral administration.

15:15

**Janette Wilson (Scottish Churches Committee):** I have a dual purpose in that I am also the secretary of the Scottish Churches Committee, which represents all the main Christian denominations in Scotland. I have accordingly consulted our committee members about the bill. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon.

I am pleased to say that, in summary, the churches welcome the bill's registration provisions. They should result in several sensible changes to registration law and practice. We hope that registration services will be more convenient for and accessible to the public without compromising the absolute need for the register to provide an accurate and complete record of major life events. The churches occasionally deal with issues and queries regarding registration, particularly where

marriage is concerned. I would like to put on record the churches' gratitude to registration staff, particularly those at the General Register Office for Scotland, who have always been most helpful and have often gone the extra mile for us to resolve any problems.

However, I am afraid to say that I have one "but". The Church of Scotland is disappointed that a small change that it had hoped would have been in the bill with regard to the solemnisation of religious marriages has been omitted. That change relates to the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977, which the bill amends in several other respects. Section 8 of the act sets out the categories of persons who can solemnise marriages. Section 8(1)(a)(i) states that

"a minister of the Church of Scotland"

can perform that task.

Like everyone else these days, as well as being grossly underpaid, church ministers are very much overworked. In rural areas in particular, several neighbouring parishes could simultaneously be between ministers from time to time. A lot of pressure can then fall on the remaining ministers who have to perform marriages in those parishes. Recognising that, in 2004, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland passed its own legislation to enable deacons of the church to conduct marriage ceremonies. Deacons are full-time professional staff who are ordained through church procedures and the church feels that they could very well perform that task. That church legislation has had to be put into cold storage until there is a change in the civil law.

Knowing that the bill would be coming along, we had hoped that it would have been an appropriate vehicle for that change. As the change has not been included, the registrar general has very helpfully agreed to grant blanket permission—renewable as necessary—on a year-to-year basis under existing legislation to enable all Church of Scotland deacons to conduct weddings. We are grateful for that but, however welcome it is, it smacks of ad hocery. All that we are looking for is the addition of two words—"and deacon"—to section 8 of the 1977 act. Therefore, the Church of Scotland would be grateful if the committee would consider introducing an amendment to that effect at stage 2. We are happy to submit written evidence about that.

Finally, I was contacted by a church minister who was delighted to see changes for the provision of marriages at sea. Seemingly, he had to conduct a wedding on the Waverley as it chugged across the Firth of Clyde. He was told clearly that he had to keep things moving and that he had to get all the legal bits done before the ship steamed from one registration area into the next; otherwise, there was the potential for illegality. He

did not say so himself, but I am sure that the thought of that put him off his stroke and that he felt that his service was not as good as it might have been on dry land. So that is one very grateful customer.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for that evidence. It is good to hear that the bill has at least one fan. I am sure that in due course the committee will consider your point about the solemnisation of marriages.

**Mr Davidson:** Referring again to the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977, deacons in the church of Rome can perform marriages and, as far as I am aware, have always been able to do so. Was that just a bypass of the legislation, or is it provided for in a special section?

**Janette Wilson:** I suspect that that comes under a different section of the legislation. There is a specific reference in the act to

"a minister of the Church of Scotland".

Although, as the registrar general has kindly indicated, there might be a procedure that would allow individual deacons to be authorised on a case-by-case basis, we are hoping to achieve recognition of their status on a par with Church of Scotland ministers.

**Mr Davidson:** Thank you for making that point. I was not aware of the issue.

The minister who conducted the ceremony on the Waverley was not out beyond the national sea boundary. We have just dealt with the Licensing (Scotland) Bill, which made provision for the licence to go with the vessel, as opposed to the authority within which it is located at a particular time, and for a vessel in a particular area to be investigated by an officer from a different council. Can you suggest any wording to get over the issue of boundaries?

**Janette Wilson:** I understand that we are talking about marriage ceremonies within territorial waters. I believe that, under the bill, that area will constitute a single registration district. At the moment, by contrast, within the Firth of Clyde there are at least two registration districts and the entire ceremony must be completed in one district. It seems to us that the bill will solve what is a potential problem at the moment.

**Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab):** Thank you for your evidence. My constituency is based very much on the parish of Bothwell. In fact, the registration office in Bellshill is housed in what is known locally as the parish chambers. However, my constituency covers parts of both North and South Lanarkshire, and Bothwell is in South Lanarkshire. Under the bill, the registration districts would be changed to make them fall entirely within one local authority area. Does that cause you any difficulty?

**Janette Wilson:** I have not had any feedback to suggest that it would cause us a problem. Obviously, one feels a certain attachment to the old parish boundaries. However, the civil parish boundaries are now very different from our Church of Scotland boundaries, because we have changed as well. The explanatory notes outline why the advantages of clinging on to the old boundaries are outweighed by the benefits of aligning registration districts with local authority areas. However, as an old-fashioned girl, I was glad to hear that there will be an administrative procedure that will allow the old names to be retained for the future.

**The Rev Graham Blount (Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office):** I have recently contacted registrars not a million miles from Michael McMahon's constituency on behalf of family members. On both occasions, I went to the wrong registration office. Although I know the area quite well, I did not know which office was the right one to deal with the people concerned, based on their addresses.

The advantage of aligning registration district boundaries with local authority boundaries is that people tend to know which local authority they live in. It will, therefore, be obvious to them which registration district they live in. The problem that sometimes arises is that there is an element of confusion. The situation in Edinburgh has long been quite different from that in Glasgow, because Edinburgh has been several different registration districts and often people are confused about which district is the appropriate one for them to go to for a marriage schedule or to register a death. Although there may be some nostalgia for the past, it is important to make things easier and to ensure that people observe the legal niceties and do not cause themselves and everyone else problems by not doing so.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** I return to the matter of deacons being able to conduct ceremonies, which seems to be eminently sensible and reasonable, for the reasons that Janette Wilson set out. Plainly, the general assembly has done a great deal of work on the issue, as have individuals such as Janette Wilson. I assume that a request was made in writing to the Executive for the necessary legislative changes to be made. Is that correct?

**Janette Wilson:** Yes. Although I have not been personally involved, I understand that there has been a dialogue with the registrar general, who tried to facilitate this arrangement. However, I assume that it was felt that the bill is more to do with registration procedures than the question of who might solemnise a marriage. Perhaps that is why it was felt that the bill was not the correct place for such a provision. My worry is that I am

not sure how long we might have to wait until some more appropriate legislation comes along in which to include the provision.

**Fergus Ewing:** The Family Law (Scotland) Bill has just completed its passage through Parliament.

**Janette Wilson:** By the time we appreciated the problem with the bill under discussion, the Family Law (Scotland) Bill was at too advanced a stage for us to intervene. Frankly, that bill dealt more with divorce and so on, and provision for who may solemnise a marriage might not have sat easily in it.

**The Rev Graham Blount:** I was asked whether it might be appropriate for us to promote an amendment to the Family Law (Scotland) Bill. My feeling was that what we propose fits more naturally with the long title of the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Bill.

**Fergus Ewing:** Fine. Has the Executive given a reason as to why it has not included your amendment in the current bill? If so, what was it?

**Janette Wilson:** We have heard indirectly. However, I was not the person who heard about it and would therefore be uncomfortable in making a further answer, but I am pretty certain that it was felt that this was very much a nuts-and-bolts bill to do with registration procedures and therefore our proposal did not sit very happily in it.

**Fergus Ewing:** My reason for asking is that, in the light of your opening statement, it is incumbent on us—it is a duty that I am sure we accept with some willingness to fulfil—to investigate the Executive's view and find out whether there is a reason why it feels that it is not appropriate to include such provision in this bill, what that reason is and whether we accept it. It is open to us, as the convener implied, to pursue an amendment as a committee rather than as individual MSPs. It might be that this is an occasion on which the committee might wish to examine that option. With that in mind, I invite you to submit what relevant material you have on this particular aspect and its technicalities. There may be a broad desire to look into the matter on a committee basis to see whether we can homologate a practice that is already authorised by the registrar general on a year-to-year basis.

**Janette Wilson:** That would be helpful and I am happy to do what Fergus Ewing asks.

**The Convener:** The bill enables the registration of births, deaths and marriages online. Do the churches have any views on those aspects of the bill?

**Janette Wilson:** If you had asked me that a while ago I might have felt, "Oh well, is this really



going to be safe and secure?" It is slightly difficult to comment because I presume that such matters will be dealt with in secondary legislation.

However, wearing a different hat, I am very much involved at the moment with questions about the automatic registration of title to land. That system will be with us in 2007. Solicitors will be able to change the land register at the touch of a button. Having had demonstrated to me all the various additional precautions that can be included in the system that will, via the wonders of computers, pick up fraud an awful lot quicker than one can do by examining ordinary signatures, I feel very comfortable with the idea.

Of course, online registration might have to be sold to the general public because we always read scare stories in the media about things going wrong with computers and costing more than everyone thinks they should. That is not always the case.

**The Convener:** I have one final question. The bill proposes the creation of a new public record—the book of Scottish connections. Do you think that that innovation will be a step forward?

15:30

**Janette Wilson:** Personally, I think that it will be a step forward. Even judging from the contact that is made with our offices, I think that people are increasingly interested in genealogy. Visitors from overseas, in particular, are keen to find out about their Scottish ancestry and it is proper that they should be able to do that.

The only comment that I had back was an expression of concern about how the information that will go into the book will be verified. Examining foreign decrees and other documents is not quite as straightforward as scrutinising documents with which one is familiar because they are Scottish or produced in the UK. In general, we welcome the creation of a book of connections and hope that it will provide another revenue stream for registration services that will enable them to reduce costs to the general public.

I was interested to hear what was said about the provision of an abbreviated death certificate free of charge. Again, I would welcome that, although I was disappointed to hear that there were concerns that it might have cost implications. Given the scope for earning money from civil marriage and civil partnership ceremonies that now exists, I would have thought that, in future, it would be possible to produce many certificates and other items free of charge, particularly once computerisation has driven down costs.

**The Convener:** As there are no further questions, I thank Janette Wilson and Graham Blount for their evidence, which has been helpful.

We now move into private session to consider the final item on our agenda.

15:32

*Meeting continued in private until 15:56.*



Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

**Friday 10 February 2006**

#### PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

##### OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

*Single copies: £5.00*

*Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00*

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

##### WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

*Single copies: £3.75*

*Annual subscriptions: £150.00*

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by Astron and available from:

**Blackwell's Bookshop**  
53 South Bridge  
Edinburgh EH1 1YS  
0131 622 8222

**Blackwell's Bookshops:**  
243-244 High Holborn  
London WC1 7DZ  
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh

**Blackwell's Scottish Parliament Documentation**  
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament, their availability and cost:

**Telephone orders and inquiries**  
0131 622 8283 or  
0131 622 8258

**Fax orders**  
0131 557 8149

**E-mail orders**  
[business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk](mailto:business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk)

**Subscriptions & Standing Orders**  
[business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk](mailto:business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk)

**RNID Typetalk calls welcome on**  
18001 0131 348 5412  
Textphone 0845 270 0152

[sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk)

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

[www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)

**Accredited Agents**  
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers

Printed in Scotland by Astron