

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 13 February 2001
(*Afternoon*)

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

6th Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Trish Godman (West Renfrew shire) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP)

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

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

*Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED :

Malcolm Chisholm (Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care)

WITNESSES

Arthur Bell (Food Trust Scotland)

Ali Black (Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society)

Gilbert Clark (Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society)

Dr Mike Cuthbert (Food Trust Scotland)

Caitlin DeSilvey (Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations)

James Glencross (Kelvinside Allotments Association)

Dr Martin Moonie (Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society)

Tony Stanton (Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations)

George Sutherland (Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations)

Jack Sutherland (Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations)

Keith Vickerman (Kelvinside Allotments Association)

Judy Wilkinson (Kelvinside Allotments Association)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Irene Fleming

ASSISTANT CLERK

Craig Harper

Neil Stewart

LOCATION

The Chamber

Scottish Parliament

Local Government Committee

Tuesday 13 February 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:04*]

Items in Private

The Convener (Trish Godman): We will make a start because we have a full agenda and, although we expect other members to attend, we are quorate.

We will take items 6, 7 and 8 in private. During item 6 we will discuss potential advisers to the committee, and we do not want what we say to be in the public domain. Item 7 is a discussion on the operation of committees. I would like that debate to be as frank as possible, as changes have been made to the number and membership of committees. That debate is not at this point a matter for the public. Item 8 is our draft report on the power of community initiative, community planning and political restrictions. We agreed last week that item 9 should be taken in private. I am not happy that we are taking so many items in private, but it just so happens that today we have to consider three papers that should not yet be in the public domain.

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): I suggest that we postpone item 8 to our first meeting after the recess. It appears that we received the report only in the past hour or so and, given the volume of work that we have today, I do not think that we can give it proper consideration.

The Convener: I appreciate that point, but 16 February is the closing date for responses. When we reach item 8, I will give you time to read the report and we will go through it line by line. I apologise that you have received the report so late. That does not happen very often on the committee. As you know, the staff have been under great pressure of work recently.

Mr Gibson: Has further thought been given to the Local Government Committee's agenda? It appears that we are being overwhelmed weekly. There is a danger that we will not be able to give the consideration that is required to everything on our agenda. Certainly, the staff seem to be under strain. This is the first occasion on which we have received a report on the day of a meeting—usually we receive reports at least 24 hours before meetings. We need seriously to consider

rescheduling some of our work.

The Convener: I take that point. It will come up for discussion when we examine the paper on committees.

Allotments Inquiry

The Convener: Today, the committee begins its inquiry into allotments. We will hear from the Federation of Allotment Holders as well as from the Food Trust Scotland. In the spring, we will hear from local authorities, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Executive. We hope to visit an allotment some time in May, when, we hope, it will be nice and sunny.

Our first witnesses are from the Food Trust Scotland. I welcome Dr Mike Cuthbert, who is its chief executive, and Arthur Bell, its chair. I will ask you to speak to your slides for a few moments, and then I will open up the session for questions.

Arthur Bell (Food Trust Scotland): The Food Trust was set up to examine Scotland's diet and consider how we can improve it; to educate people on good food and diet; to broadcast the importance of Scottish food as a key part of our culture; to work to develop small, specialist producers; and to expand the visitor attractions of Scotland by improving the whole food scene. That is a broad remit. Much of our thinking has been on the necessity of ensuring that people improve their diet through eating fresh fruit and vegetables. The day of the deep-fried pizza, with curry sauce and chips and a six-pack of Tennant's must go.

We were particularly impressed by the Scottish diet action plan and the amount of work that was put into that. We were asked to conduct the first ever survey and study of Scotland's allotments. Mike Cuthbert will give the background to that study.

Dr Mike Cuthbert (Food Trust Scotland): The survey that we conducted was the first to have been done in Scotland since the Allotments (Scotland) Act 1892, which established allotments in Scotland, was passed. There is a fundamental difference between the situation in Scotland and that in England. In Scotland, on other than planning matters, responsibility for allotments resides entirely with local authorities. In England, consent for closing an allotment site has to be obtained from the Minister for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Consequently, there is quite a difference in the information that is on the database in Scotland and in the experience of allotmenteeing.

Other than a small survey that was conducted for a political reason, there has never been a survey like the one that we carried out. The survey was constrained in our ability to obtain basic data from local authorities and allotment gardeners. That constraint limited the conclusions that we could reach.

Our principal finding was that the situation relating to the closure of allotments, which has caused much concern in England, is static in Scotland. There has not been much movement by local authorities to close allotments.

We found that there has been an increase in demand for allotment gardens. Generally, the type of people who want to do allotment gardening has changed. Certainly, there are more of the green-welly brigade—the ecological type of people—but there has also been an increase in the number of younger people and women who want to take up allotments. There is a severe underprovision of allotments—Edinburgh is a dramatic example of that.

The problem with demand is that it depends on advertising. Advertising and the general provision of information by local authorities are very poor. Secondly, and most important in our view, the quality of service is a crucial factor. If one has spent three months growing prize marrows, but someone gets into the allotment and in five minutes vandalises it or steals tools, one will not be encouraged to continue. The quality of service relates directly to the level of investment.

Rents are extremely low. The highest rent is about £30 a year, and the lowest is £2 or £3. Allotments are expensive to maintain. There is a major opportunity for innovation and the development of other kinds of allotments, particularly in peripheral areas. In Edinburgh, an acre of land for housing is worth £2 million, so obviously it is not possible to expand allotments in central areas.

There has been a great change in how allotments are used. People access allotments from places of residence that are at a much greater distance than used to be the case. Traditionally, people could walk to their allotments with their tools and walk back with their produce. We found that it is very common for people to travel a mile or several miles to allotments.

We certainly think that two lines of development are needed. One is in investment, to raise quality and standards. The other is in innovation, to develop new forms of allotments, particularly on the periphery of a settlement, where much larger allotments could be developed. Those allotments could be associated with other schemes offering biodiversity advantages, such as community woodlands. A community hut or shop could also be available if the allotments were arranged on a larger scale.

We think that allotments have been a forgotten area in local authorities and that there is a need for major innovation and fresh thinking. Allotments can certainly make a considerable contribution to a healthier lifestyle in Scotland. We have some

specific ideas on that, and I shall let Arthur Bell tell you something about them.

14:15

Arthur Bell: There should be much greater marketing of the availability of allotments. I am certain that there are tens of thousands of people living in tower blocks or tenements who would enjoy the opportunity to grow their own fruit and vegetables, but who do not know how to go about it because nobody says that plots are available. In a city where 40 per cent of allotments are empty, they are empty only because nobody is telling the people who would actually like to work those allotments how they can get an allotment. Marketing costs would be minimal; there would be no need for television advertising. All that is needed is a simple notice saying, "We have three plots available at the moment. Please come and join us."

Social inclusion is of considerable importance. Allotments tended originally to be places where people who had limited incomes were able to grow food for their own families. That still applies. There are areas in Scotland where there is considerable food poverty. Allotment facilities could be developed for people in those areas, and local authorities could target certain communities, building or opening up allotments to enable many people who are buying pre-packaged supermarket products with a very high added value to grow their own food. It is absolutely nuts that a housewife who does not have a lot of money should be buying pre-washed and pre-peeled carrots in a little cellophane bag, which have been flown in from Zimbabwe. Scotland has a good climate and good soil for growing fruit and vegetables. Growing our own food could be considerably expanded through proper targeting by local authorities.

There could be an expansion through linking the development of allotments to severe social problems. I am thinking of community service. People could be, if you like, sentenced to developing new allotment grounds, thereby getting involved in the positive aspects of gardening. It is no surprise that gardening is Britain's biggest hobby, yet millions of people do not have the opportunity to do it. Getting young people in at an early age to discover how to grow fruit and vegetables would be extremely educational and would involve many youngsters in very positive work. I sit in this chariot of fire—my wheelchair. I know that very few allotment plots around the country are suitable for people with disabilities. I do not see why youngsters could not be sent to create plots for people with disabilities, who could then get out of the entrapment of their own house to somewhere where they could grow their own

fruit and vegetables, improving their diet and allowing them to mix socially in the community.

The environmental aspect is also important. Developing allotments can encourage a greening of the community. Many local authorities—with all due respect to them—think that vast slabs of grass are greening the environment. However, allotments that are hedged in for security can encourage the growth of wildlife. There could be secure play areas within those allotment areas, so that parents who are growing fruit and vegetables could bring their kids, who would then be encouraged to study the wildlife and get involved in every aspect of growing food and having a better diet.

The Convener: Allotments in England and Wales are less threatened than they are in Scotland. Do you think that there is a need for Scottish ministers to issue consent when a local authority wants to close an allotment? Should the proposal come before the Scottish Executive before a decision is made? I believe that something similar happens in England and Wales.

Dr Cuthbert: In practice, it has not been necessary to protect allotments in Scotland, because there have not been a great many closures. The total number of allotment plots in Scotland is between 4,500 and 5,000. Figures vary a bit, because many local authorities have half plots. In England, there are about 250,000 allotment plots. There have been more severe losses in England, where local authorities have been developing plum sites, than in Scotland. The situation might change in the future, but I do not think that what you suggest is necessary at the moment.

The Convener: I understand that it can be difficult to identify the person in a local authority who actually deals with allotments. Would it be an idea to have an allotments officer for each local authority? You made some interesting points about marketing and social inclusion, but there must be difficulties from the outset if you cannot identify who is responsible for allotments.

Arthur Bell: There are already two areas in local authorities where there are people who have related responsibilities. Most local authorities have parks departments, which grow flowers to put in the council chamber and do decorative work for the baskets in the streets. There are therefore people with gardening skills who are working for local authorities. Perhaps they could be involved in developing allotments, and somebody from the parks department of each council could have responsibility for that.

The other thing that we would like, which does not necessarily relate to local government, is the development of culinary skills, so that people know

how to use the fresh fruit and vegetables rather than just boiling the life out of them. There are nutritionists and dieticians working for local authorities, dealing with school meals and meals on wheels, and their skills could be used.

Somebody in each local authority should be designated to look after allotments. It does not require any great expenditure or capital or revenue outlay. It is just a matter of reallocating some of the existing resources and making people responsible for them.

Dr Cuthbert: Two thirds of the allotments in Scotland are in the four cities. None of them has full-time, dedicated allotment officers, but all four parks departments have someone with allotment responsibilities, so there is someone to contact. As far as the smaller settlements and rural areas are concerned, anything goes.

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): What are the biggest obstacles to developing allotments—particularly new allotments—and addressing the imbalance between demand and supply? Does the legislative framework make that difficult? Is the problem that land is not available? Do councils lack the resources to purchase land on which to develop new allotments?

Arthur Bell: Enough land is probably available in local authority land banks. Brownfield sites in our towns and cities could also be developed and greened. We are not talking about prime housing land on which there is huge housing pressure. As Dr Cuthbert said, development on the periphery of the towns, near large peripheral estates, is possible. Therefore, availability of land is not the problem.

The obstacle is the fact that there are no guidelines and that no one actively promotes allotments. They are a fringe activity for the local authorities, yet they have much unfulfilled potential for doing good. There is a lack of responsibility and guidance. If the Scottish Executive laid down guidelines for local authorities and COSLA, and said, "Look, we feel that you should think about allotments because of the benefits that you can give your communities at little cost," that might be enough to stimulate more activity.

Mr Gibson: I find the issue fascinating. You talked about some plots lying derelict for years, but the information to the committee appears to show increasing demand, particularly in Edinburgh. Given the social inclusion agenda, do you think that those on the waiting list who live in tower blocks or tenement flats and do not have their own gardens should be given priority, or do you think that allotments should be offered on a first-come first-served basis, even in areas of severe pressure, such as Edinburgh?

Dr Cuthbert: The situation in Edinburgh is a bit

of an exception in Scotland. There is no prioritisation in the west, and people get access. The quality of the service affects that, and vandalism is a particular factor. The quality of the peripheral fencing and the facilities are also relevant factors.

Arthur Bell: If allotments are allowed to run down, two things happen. People will not want to go and garden on them, and the local authority will feel that the demand is not present. If, as I suggested, young work forces were used to upgrade the allotments and their facilities, they would be made more presentable, and people would say, "Hey, I'd like to have an allotment." However, they would need to be told how to obtain an allotment.

Mr Gibson is correct: some areas should have priority. In some large areas of council housing, each house has its own garden, so priority need not be given to those areas, but some other areas with tower blocks and tenement blocks have nothing but a big swath of grass.

Mr Gibson: In Glasgow, 9 per cent of the land is vacant or derelict, so a lot of brownfield land is available to be used. Given that, does the local authority lack interest in allotments or would it like to do something but cannot because of resource constraints? I imagine that restoring a brownfield site to a site on which plants can be grown is difficult; for example, there might be toxins in the ground. Securing such a site against vandals must be quite expensive. Do the local authorities lack the will or the resources, or is it a combination of the two?

Arthur Bell: I think that allotments are just not a sexy subject. No one has thought them important. They have slipped away since the end of world war two.

Mr Gibson: Dig for victory and all that.

Arthur Bell: For example, there was a need for food for Britain and people had to grow their own. Since then, allotments have slipped away, and that is a matter of neglect.

The local enterprise companies and Scottish Enterprise have a remit to redevelop brownfield sites. I do not see why there should not be a partnership between a local authority and a LEC to take an area and, rather than grassing it over once it has been cleared of toxins, turn it into allotments. Vandalism and security are key issues. I genuinely believe that we should think not about fencing—over which people climb—but about hedging with hawthorns, briars and roses. Visually, they would be attractive, and they would be like our original farming stock-proof fences—the beasts just do not go through the briar.

Mr Gibson: Indeed. Would you intend the Food

Trust Scotland to have tripartite discussions with COSLA and Scottish Enterprise on trying to obtain land for the purposes that you suggest?

14:30

Arthur Bell: I would have thought it a good idea to consider some pilot schemes in deprived areas, to find out what can be done. We have expertise on the dietary side and the food side and could provide input. We do not have—and I do not have—what might be described as welly-boot expertise. However, if COSLA wanted our advice, we would be prepared to assist it.

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): My question is not dissimilar to Kenny Gibson's question about prioritising and making allotments accessible to people who might otherwise not have the opportunity to garden. I am interested in giving access to disabled people. I have seen an allotment that has raised areas, but such provision seems to be quite difficult to expand, because the resource implications for a local authority might be daunting. Do you have the arguments that would sustain the claim that there is a demand for such allotments and prove the commercial viability of improving access?

Arthur Bell: I do not think that there will be enormous demand from disabled people, but there will be some demand, which will not be satisfied. We could use some of the techniques that I talked about, such as using youngsters on training schemes or community self-help projects. There are ways and means of achieving our goal without calling in the most expensive people such as Tarmac or Wimpey to landscape the area. That should be done from within the community, so that there is a feeling of community involvement and youngsters can feel proud that they helped to build a garden for disabled people. I do not think that there need be huge financial constraints.

Mr McMahon: I wonder whether your comment suggests a conscripted force going out to work on allotments. Would not that defeat the purpose? Is not that a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation? If the demand is there, do people have to be conscripted to do the job?

Arthur Bell: We know that the demand is twice the supply in Edinburgh. In other areas, there are no allotments, so no one has any idea whether there is any demand. It is easy enough to do a little survey of 1,000 houses by duplicating a piece of paper saying, "Would you be interested?" It is significant that gardening programmes on television, followed by food programmes, are two of the most popular. I do not believe that people who have no access to allotments are not in the least bit interested in good food or gardening. The two could be combined.

Dr Cuthbert: The Executive has placed priority on health. Scotland's diet action plan identified a need to double per capita fruit and vegetable consumption within 10 years. We are halfway through that period and I do not think that we have made any progress. Given the Executive's interest in joined-up policy making and the disastrous condition of health—much of which is related to nutrition and diet—the obvious benefits of people growing their own fruit and vegetables are there to be grasped. However, there must be education programmes and policies of social inclusion that include targeting, which goes wider than just prioritising plots. There must be real investment.

To take an example, Dumfries and Galloway has a much wider policy of developing local food as an economic activity by relating health to what it calls wealth and the environment. It is in such approaches that we should seek opportunities for development.

Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I apologise for being late and not having heard your full presentation, particularly if you have already covered the point about which I wish to ask. Are allotments in Scotland under pressure because of land being sold off? If so, is the land being sold for housing developments and so on or for something else?

Dr Cuthbert: Relatively speaking, there is no great pressure on allotments in Scotland. The situation is quite different from that in England. The total base of 4,500 to 5,000 plots is fairly small. Two thirds of the plots are in the four cities and the local authorities in those areas see allotments as a significant priority. The situation is rather dormant—the authorities are not getting rid of the plots, nor are they developing and investing in them. No one is talking about allotments. That is what we hope to alter through the petition.

Mr Paterson: My father had a plot when I was fairly young and our family used it to supplement our food supply. We even had exotic things such as rhubarb, which I do not think that we would have ever clapped eyes on otherwise, because we simply could not have afforded it. Do people still use their plots to augment their household supplies, or is it purely a hobby?

Arthur Bell: People use their plots to supplement their vegetable intake, and indeed many use them as their principal source of vegetables. People probably grow more vegetables than fruit, although both are equally important.

A properly co-ordinated development of plots—increasing the number of allotments from 5,000 to 20,000—could have an important effect on people's health, particularly in the west of Scotland. If people were encouraged to take up

plots, as they were for different reasons during wartime, it would have great health benefits for Scotland.

Mr Paterson: I am fairly interested in education. About a year ago I heard a child say that they thought that apples were produced by Cadbury's. I take it that you are looking to explain to children that apples grow on trees and are not manufactured.

Arthur Bell: Local authorities might link up with local primary schools; a primary school could have an allotment where the kids could find out how a seed develops into something that we eat. That would teach them that something fresh out of the ground could be good for you and need not be flown in from Peru. That would do a lot of good.

Dr Cuthbert: I will add an anecdote to that. In one school, I met some kids who were surprised that the adult allotmenters were not chucking away the mucky carrots—the ones that came fresh out of the ground covered in earth—because the children thought that carrots came with no leaves and wrapped in plastic.

A professor of nutrition at the University of Glasgow has told me that admission records to the accident and emergency unit at one of the hospitals showed that 30 per cent of the population were clinically defined as starving. That was not because they were not ingesting food, but because the food that they were eating was so poor and inadequate nutritionally. We know, through the work of other departments in the Scottish Executive, that that is not a minor factor in terms of health and that the returns on addressing that could be significant. If we could alter that in Scotland significantly, the statistic that gives Scotland the same health status as the former communist countries of eastern Europe could be overturned.

The Convener: Thank you. I am impressed by the project in Possil, where the drugs forum and a homelessness group have been involved in creating and working allotments. I can think of a project in the west end, which is not quite an allotment, but which grows herbs and vegetables in raised beds for local residents, and involves in particular recovering alcoholics, adults with learning disabilities and people with other disabilities. Your comments about social inclusion are apposite. That is something that the committee and the Parliament must consider. Thank you for coming to give evidence.

Arthur Bell: Thank you for having us.

The Convener: Our next witnesses are from Kelvinside Allotments Association. I must declare an interest as I have an enormous—it seems that way on a wet, cold and windy day—allotment in Kelvinside. I welcome Judy Wilkinson, the

secretary and Keith Vickerman, the vice-president, of Kelvinside Allotments Association. I also welcome James Glencross, who is secretary of Broomhill Allotments Association and treasurer of the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society. Judy will make a presentation and then we will open up the session for questions.

14:45

Judy Wilkinson (Kelvinside Allotments Association): I will start with a quick presentation to give the committee a flavour of an allotment site in Glasgow. The Kelvinside allotments are on two sites: Julian Avenue and Kirklee Road. The sites are approximately two acres each. Most of the plots are 30ft by 60ft, although some plots are half plots. We grow all the traditional varieties of vegetable that are available in Scotland. We also grow soft fruit: there is a great mixture of raspberries, strawberries and blackcurrants. Herbs are increasingly popular. Most plots have flowers and flower borders, with native and exotic species. We grow a rich variety of plants.

Facilities are important. On Julian Avenue, we have water, a Portakabin with toilets and nicely laid out tarmac paths. There is a good periphery fence. The Kirklee Road site has water and gravel paths, and we acquired a composting toilet at Christmas. Both sites have good access.

I will now outline the breakdown of people in the Kelvinside Allotments Association and make a comparison with the New Victoria gardens, which is near the Tramway theatre—I thought that it would be interesting to see the differences and similarity between the two. In Kelvinside, we have 102 plots. Two people are now allowed to sign up for a plot and the number of plots with two people is increasing. Of plot holders, 49 per cent are women—the figure is 51 per cent at New Victoria gardens. Of our plots, 15 per cent are worked by gardeners of ethnic origin. About 20 per cent of plots at both sites are visited regularly by people's children and grandchildren. That gives you a flavour of the community that we have at the Kelvinside allotments and at New Victoria gardens.

The age profile of the plot holders peaks between 30 and 60. There is a small number of plot holders under 30, but that number is growing. There are a number of plot holders over 60. The high percentage of plot holders living within one mile of the plots surprised me—our examination of the postcodes of plot holders showed that figure to be 85 per cent. Some live a little further out.

Our contact with the City of Glasgow Council has changed slightly since responsibility for the running of parks went from the parks department to land services. We currently pay £6.50 per plot.

In the new budget, which I think was approved on Thursday, that has gone up to £26, which is a 300 per cent increase.

The parks department had a part-time allotment officer and it provided the framework and regulations. It provided four skips a year and some help with maintenance—including of the periphery fence, the trees and the gravel paths—and it organised the prizes. The department—now land services—is the final arbiter in any disputes. On Kelvinside allotments, we had recourse to that service only once, about 10 or 15 years ago.

We are locally managed. That is a good thing, because we charge £8 per plot for the local association. We arrange the annual general meeting; we look after the constitution and rules; we manage the waiting list; we keep the cultivation good; we have site inspections; we organise manure; we do site maintenance; we liaise with the local community; we run competitions; and we keep up our network with other allotment communities in Glasgow.

Other sites have more active liaison. Some have raffles, some have ceilidhs and some have seed schemes. The devolved management allows the sites to develop that sort of activity.

As for the extent of interest, the number of people on our waiting list is almost the same as the number of plots. The turnover of plots is between 5 per cent and 10 per cent a year. The size of the waiting list means that people have to wait four years for a plot in Kelvinside. The allotments are not advertised—we dare not advertise them. People can find out about them only by telephoning land services, coming along to our open day or coming to the site and asking how to get in touch with me. There is no notice board.

Glasgow City Council's 1998 local plan review said that a main reason for migration from the city was people's desire for a bigger house with a garden in a better environment. I will compare the situation in Glasgow with the situation in Cambridge. Glasgow has five times as many people as Cambridge, which is a nice city in which a lot of houses have gardens. Even so, Cambridge has 38 allotment sites and Glasgow has only 26; Cambridge has more than 100 acres of land devoted to allotments while Glasgow has only about 29 acres; Cambridge has 1,800 plots while Glasgow has only 700, according to the city budget; and Cambridge has one plot for every 67 people while Glasgow has one plot for about every 874 people.

I will now give some Glasgow City Council statistics from 1996 on the council wards surrounding our allotment site. It is interesting to note that, in Wynford, 81 per cent of the households have no car and 92.3 per cent of

people live in flats. In Hyndland, 96.4 per cent of people live in flats. The area with the lowest percentage of people who live in flats is Kelvindale, with 58.2 per cent. Within our area, an awful lot of people live in flatted accommodation and have no access to gardens or gardening. The council is concerned about that and says that it is important that people have access to green space, that accessing green space should require no special effort and that that space should be within walking distance. We agree with that.

Why are we interested in gardens? People like to garden and to grow plants. Most people with allotments grow food and eat it. Allotments provide release from stress and opportunities for exercise. They allow people to meet other people, including people whom they would not meet in any other way. There is a mixture of people of differing ages from various walks of life and with differing concerns; all can meet and talk on an allotment site. That is important. People can pass on knowledge and skills to children and encourage their children's interest in nature. Those are the traditional interests in allotments, which are evident in Kelvinside. There are new interests associated with sites such as the marvellous one at Hamiltonhill in Possil Park. Such sites are used by community groups and educational projects are run in them. Hamiltonhill has a wildlife area and is becoming a central focus of the area.

There is a need to review legislation. We lost a site in Kirklee south in 1990. The Scottish Office conducted an inquiry at the time. The site had been owned by Glasgow University, which had bought it for student accommodation but had sold it for housing development after deciding not to build accommodation there. Five years before the inquiry, the allotment leases were cancelled and people moved off the site. The site lay derelict all that time. Mr Bell, the Scottish Office inquiry reporter at the time, said that, although he recognised

"the usefulness and recreational value of allotments"

and accepted that there was

"an unsatisfied demand",

there was

"no adopted policy on the minimum standard of allotment provision".

He said that the site was no longer in allotment use—but that was because we had been chucked off. Finally, he said that the local plan did

"no more than encourage the retention of allotments."

Therefore, as Mr Bell saw it, we had no legal basis for our appeal to keep our site. We lost it.

We suggest that there is a need for a national and a local policy to support allotments. Glasgow

City Council has said that it wants a quality environment; we believe that allotments are part of a quality environment. The council's west area review asked how open spaces, such as allotments, could be protected, but it did not give any answers. In 1998, the council said that it would maintain allotments where there was an identified demand for them. However, the council is not, I think, actively promoting allotments, and we cannot identify demand because there is no advertising and no promotion of allotments.

What would allotment holders like? In Kelvinside, we would like security of tenure. We feel under threat because we are a prime site for development. We have two acres of land in the west end. The Kirklee Road and Julian Avenue sites are owned by the universities and leased to the council. That again is prime land in the west end of Glasgow. Our lease has to be renewed every year, so we feel under threat. A lot of sites have similar worries about security of tenure.

We would also like recognition. We feel that allotments are a wonderful resource and can make a positive contribution to the community and to urban renaissance. Despite that, we are often considered the poor relation in comparison with other activities.

Less fortunate sites—and there are many in Glasgow city centre—desperately need help with major problems such as the security of site boundaries. In the short term they need fences, because hedges take a long time to grow. The sites also need paths. Many do not have a good water supply and many have no toilets. The community at large wants sufficient allotment sites to meet demand—and there definitely is an untapped demand.

Most Glasgow sites are happy with devolved management. Plot holders like to organise themselves. Once a site is in good order, as the Kelvinside one is, the local group finds it easy and not expensive to run. We manage our affairs very well, but we have a good site. Things work well when sites do not have problems; the ones that have problems have them because of a lack of funding.

The Convener: You said that there had been an increase to £26. Is that the local authority rent?

Judy Wilkinson: Yes.

The Convener: What does your association receive for the allotments?

Judy Wilkinson: We receive £8 per plot. The cost to an individual at the moment is £14.50 per plot—£6.50 to the council and £8 to the association. That varies of course: some sites charge more and some less. However, in the council budget on Thursday, which I think has

been passed, it was recommended that the council charge go up to £26. If there were concessions for old age pensioners and the unemployed—£26 is quite a lot to find—people would accept that. It would help if we had something in return; there is no budget for allotments, and people have to find money for fencing and so on.

The Convener: You have said that there should be a sliding scale that would allow old age pensioners and people on income support to pay less. You also said that you want to establish what Glasgow City Council does with the money that it gets from the allotments.

Judy Wilkinson: Yes.

The Convener: I take it that you will pursue that.

Judy Wilkinson: Yes.

Mr Gibson: How important are allotments to biodiversity?

15:00

Keith Vickerman (Kelvinside Allotments Association): They have considerable importance. Allotments provide a green artery—a chain of green sites—through cities, which supports an incredible community of animals. Pollinating insects are a good example: they are essential to the work of allotments and to growing food. There is an incredible diversity of species in the allotments in Kelvinside, given that it is a relatively isolated site in the west end of Glasgow. A major function of allotments is to provide sites for biodiversity in the city. The sites form refuges for birds. In the west end, there has been an enormous decline in the sparrow population. I am proud to say that in Julian Avenue we have a thriving relict sparrow population. Allotments provide seed for seed-eating birds—someone is doing a good job even if they keep a weedy plot, because that provides seed for birds. Allotments are of considerable importance for biodiversity.

Mr Gibson: Given that importance and given what Judy Wilkinson said about minimum provision, would you like a minimum allotment provision of a specific number of hectares in urban areas—for example, 1 hectare per square kilometre? Do you have a figure in mind for the amount of land in urban areas that the Scottish Executive should legislate for, to ensure that allotments are not here today and gone tomorrow but are here for future generations, regardless of how housing, industry and services in cities develop?

James Glencross (Kelvinside Allotments Association): We cannot pluck a figure out of the air—it depends on the demand. As Judy Wilkinson said, we are nervous of advertising. My plot is

slightly smaller than those at Kelvinside—it is in Beechwood. I was told that it would take six years to get a plot, but that is unreasonable. We should have a policy that enables those who want a plot to expect to get one within two or three years. You might think that that is generous and that the time should be four or five years. However, there could be some sort of accelerating mechanism for people who would especially benefit from having an allotment. That is the way to work—to consider the demand.

We must not fool ourselves: the last thing that most people want is to be burdened with a plot, but an allotment would be very attractive to people who live in the sort of accommodation that we are describing. I have a garden, but it is two pocket handkerchiefs at the front and two or three at the back. That size garden does not give people any satisfaction. However, many people would enjoy having an allotment. Many people come to a phase in their lives—early retirement, for example—when they would welcome one. Many applicants plan towards that. We should work backwards from that and establish what the demand would be—I think that it would be very substantial.

Judy Wilkinson: One hectare would be about 60 plots. Cambridge has one plot for every 67 people—that is probably generous. The local council would have to establish what the demand was, which would probably grow as people became more confident and began to understand what was happening.

Mr Gibson: Yes, but there is obviously a tremendous potential for growth in an area such as Glasgow. What more could Glasgow City Council realistically do to improve allotment provision and services, given competing demand for land and resources and the fact that the council has quadrupled what you have to pay each year, despite what was alleged to be the most generous local government settlement in history?

Judy Wilkinson: Allotment areas should be considered in every old and new housing development. The key issue is walking distance. People want to be able to walk to their plot in the evening and gather their vegetables for their dinner, or take their kids there on foot. We must remember that, with a bit of help, a 30ft by 60ft plot can provide a family of four with the vegetables and soft fruit that they need pretty much all year round.

The site needs to be well set out; if there are good boundaries and it looks nice, people will respect it. The local communities should be involved. For example, since young people have become involved at Hamiltonhill, there has been an amazing decrease in the amount of vandalism. Any allotment site should be community driven;

the difference in such sites from community to community is amazing. Some have a lot of huts, whereas some have no huts; some have lots of flowers; some have much community involvement, whereas others do not; and some sites are large, whereas some are small. Allotments can provide people with a rich community existence and experience. However, the site must be driven by the people who live in the community—those people need support to get the allotments started and as established as our west end sites are.

Mr McMahon: The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is considering the introduction of a best practice guide based on work undertaken by the City of Edinburgh Council. First, are you aware of that guide? Secondly, have you been involved in the consultation? Thirdly, what would be the benefits of such a guide?

Judy Wilkinson: I know about the guide. Although the Federation of Edinburgh District Allotments and Gardens Associations has been invited to give evidence, so far the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society has not been. Any good practice guide should offer a mixture of the Glasgow and Edinburgh models. The Glasgow model is good on devolved management, which gives power to the sites and thus empowers the local community. However, the Glasgow allotments are not joined up.

The Edinburgh model, which is centrally managed, misses any sense of individual responsibility on the site. For example, the associations do not receive any money to develop the sites and they do not run the waiting lists. However, as they meet bi-monthly, all the allotment sites stay in touch with each other, which allows them to form a consistent policy and to share experience and resources.

We agree with the introduction of a good practice guide. I was talking with Liz McKinlay from New Victoria gardens about site management issues such as dealing with someone who does not look after their plot or the few people who are not socially able and cause problems on sites. I think that we need to share such experience.

Mr Paterson: On a point of clarification, Glasgow City Council has pulled out of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, so you do not need to worry too much about that problem. Perhaps you could help me—I am a little confused. During your presentation, you talked about two sites—Julian Avenue and Kirklee Road—in the west of Glasgow. If I understand correctly, the Kirklee Road site no longer exists. Is that correct, or are you about to lose that site?

Judy Wilkinson: We had three sites, including Kirklee north and Kirklee south. In 1990, we lost

Kirklee south, which was quite a big loss. That was when the public inquiry took place—I gave members the findings from the Scottish Office reporter. We were supported by the local authority, which set up the inquiry and fought the development, so it was the local authority that lost.

Mr Paterson: I understand. If there were a minimum requirement, do you reckon that the Kirklee sites would still be as they were?

Judy Wilkinson: I forget what the format of the wording was, but it was merely suggested that allotments are a good idea. The wording must be much stronger than that; the provision of allotments should be a category in the national planning guidelines. The guidelines should include a recommended number of allotments, which could be increased as demand grows. That would really help us to protect allotments.

Mr Paterson: Should the national planning guidelines require local authorities to be involved in allotments? More to the point, do you get help from Glasgow City Council with problems that might arise? Have you established liaison with the council?

Judy Wilkinson: The situation is changing. When the parks and recreation department was responsible for allotments, it had an allotment officer called Grant Findlay. However, allotments now come under land services and that is rather sad, because that department covers roads and cleansing, and parks come way down its list of priorities. There is no longer an allotment officer. Somebody from land services takes our rents and the original allotment officer has no remit to help us. The situation has changed in the past three months and I am not quite sure where we will go from here. It was good when Grant Findlay was the allotment officer, because he gave us advice and organised the prizes. He also networked and told us about other allotment sites and helped with liaison throughout the city.

Mr Paterson: Has liaison broken down in the past three months?

Judy Wilkinson: Yes.

Mr Gibson: That is unfortunate.

The Convener: Thank you for your evidence.

Your comment about national planning guidelines was interesting. I was also unaware that Glasgow City Council had lost the allotment link person. We will consider those issues.

The last two presentations highlighted the recycling role of allotments. I do not throw anything out—I keep everything because I think that I will be able to use it on my allotment. We should push that aspect. Allotment holders were the original recyclers because they threw nothing

out. We will be able to pursue that angle.

Later in the year, we will invite COSLA, a couple of local authorities and the Scottish Executive to give us evidence, following which we will produce a report. I am sure that the witnesses will watch that process with interest.

15:15

Comrades, we are joined now by representatives of the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations. The witnesses are Jack Sutherland, who is the president of FEDAGA and a plot holder at Ferry Road; Tony Stanton, who is the secretary of FEDAGA and a plot holder at Saughton Mains; Caitlin DeSilvey, who is a plot holder at Telferton and a research student who is studying the history of allotments in Edinburgh at the University of Edinburgh; and George Sutherland, who is a FEDAGA committee member and a plot holder at Saughton Mains.

Jack Sutherland (Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations): I am Jack Sutherland. I am a plot holder at Ferry Road and president of the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations. FEDAGA represents more than 1,200 plot holders in Edinburgh and the Lothians. Its purposes are to ensure the security of tenure of sites; to bring services on those sites up to modern standards; to ensure good site management and utilisation; and to make allotments sites good neighbours to the surrounding residents. We also strive to ensure that there is an adequate supply of suitably located new sites, so that everybody who wants an allotment can get one near to them and without having to wait for several years. Caitlin DeSilvey will present statistics that show the current position of allotments and their services in Edinburgh.

Caitlin DeSilvey (Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations): I am a geography student at the University of Edinburgh. I will share with the committee some information about the extent of interest in allotment cultivation in Edinburgh and about the local authority's practice in providing and maintaining allotments.

I draw members' attention to the graph that shows the 60-year trend in allotment provision and demand in Edinburgh. There are two key points that can be drawn from the data. First, as the red line shows, demand for allotments in Edinburgh has been rising steadily for the past three decades. The number of people on the council waiting list has, in the past five years alone, risen by 50 per cent to the current level of 1,200.

Secondly, the graph shows that increased

demand has not stimulated an expansion of Edinburgh's allotment provision. The dark blue line, which is the second line from the top on the graph, shows a levelling-off of provision during the late 1960s.

I will elaborate briefly on those two points. In relation to the level of demand, I ask the committee to reflect on the fact that there would still be people on the waiting list even if the council doubled the number of its plots in Edinburgh. In order for the red line to be at zero, the dark blue line would need to rise to 2,400. If one takes into account the fact that the council conducts little or no advertising about its allotment service, one can reasonably assume that latent demand is significantly higher than registered demand. Many people on the council waiting list are from the 62 per cent of Edinburgh residents who live in flats without gardens. For those people, access to centrally located allotments and green space is a pressing need.

I will provide some history. In 1952, the town planning officer recommended the provision in the city of one plot to every 125 residents. The current provision in Edinburgh is approximately 1 plot to every 420 residents. That is one third of the recommended amount, although it is better than the amount in Glasgow, which Judy Wilkinson told the committee about. The City of Edinburgh Council currently manages 1,054 allotment plots on approximately 60 acres of land.

As members can see from the graph that we have provided, allotment provision peaked during world war two, when the total number of private and council plots exceeded 5,000. Many emergency sites reverted to their original uses after the war. Other private and public sites were developed for housing. Council allotment provision alone has dropped by 30 per cent since 1963. Our estimates suggest that there has been a comparable decline in private allotments, but it is difficult to track accurately the development of those often undocumented private sites. Historically, allotments have been extremely vulnerable to development pressure, and that continues. It is worth noting that at least four of the council-owned allotment sites in Edinburgh are held on the housing revenue account, and might be affected by any transfer of ownership of the housing stock.

In closing, I wish to point out that vulnerability to development pressure is compounded by a disparity in investment between allotments and other recreational activities, as members have heard from the other delegations. In Edinburgh, the recreation department budgeted £4,000 for the year 2000 for the entire allotment system. We estimate that that equals one seventh of the amount that was allocated to other activities per

hour of use. I thank the committee for taking an interest in the vital role that allotments play in the urban landscape.

George Sutherland (Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations): I am George Sutherland, a plot holder at Saughton, and a committee member of FEDAGA. We believe that the current national legislation and its application—particularly the poor funding and lack of commitment on the part of the City of Edinburgh Council—are the root causes of the decline in Edinburgh's allotments, as outlined in Caitlin DeSilvey's statistics. The reason for the steep rise in waiting lists is the desire of today's urban residents to benefit from the many attractions of allotment gardening. We also believe that better publicity and improved availability of allotments would lead to an even steeper rise in demand. Few people are prepared to wait for up to 10 years for a plot.

Despite that fact that Edinburgh is one of the better providers in some respects, existing plot holders' needs are not being met, particularly with regard to poor security of tenure, poor boundary security and poor boundary screening. Those three factors contribute to the run-down appearance of some sites. In addition, other unmet needs include the almost total lack of toilet provision; incomplete water supplies; inadequate provision of meeting room accommodation; inadequate provision of secure storage areas; lack of support for new plot holder induction and outreach and generally poor maintenance of the sites. Members should contrast that with other recreational facilities.

One hundred years ago, the provision of allotments was seen as a means of allowing low-wage earners to grow their own food cheaply. The benefits of today's allotments have changed and are generally accepted as being the following: provision of a resource that provides a healthy and sustainable food supply, often in an organic environment; composting and recycling of organic waste and its consequential saving in landfill; local provision of healthy outdoor activity and exercise for all ages and social and ethnic groups; provision of a resource for education in the most basic activity of food production; fostering of community development and cohesiveness; provision of access to nature and wildlife as a means of stress relief for residents in densely populated urban areas; and provision of open spaces for local communities.

Jack Sutherland: Edinburgh's councils have managed allotments for 88 years. Only now, and mainly as a result of pressure from FEDAGA, has the City of Edinburgh Council drawn up a strategy for allotments.

In Edinburgh, allotments have a low profile in

other council strategies such as sustainable development and social inclusion strategies. The provision of properly funded and serviced allotments, rather than open grassland, should form part of every major residential development. For the reasons that we mentioned, we urge the Scottish Parliament to set up a working party on allotments. We support the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society's petition. Since FEDAGA represents more than 20 per cent of all Scottish allotment holders, we are happy to participate in setting up and running the working party.

The Convener: Thank you. You mentioned that the City of Edinburgh Council is considering a strategy for allotments. Are you involved in that process? Will the strategy be presented to you for comment?

Jack Sutherland: We were involved in the first meeting, which was held last Thursday. It was a preliminary meeting—its main business was to appoint a consultant.

The Convener: Before Kenny Gibson says anything, I will say that the City of Edinburgh Council has not left COSLA, so I can ask my next question. COSLA will consider guidelines for all Scotland. Would they be helpful? I accept that there is nothing to stop the City of Edinburgh Council doing its own thing, as it has before, but it seems to the committee that some firmed-up guidelines to which everybody in Scotland could adhere might be better.

Jack Sutherland: If we were invited to take part in that exercise, we would give our input.

Tony Stanton (Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations): The situation is so diverse between the major urban settlement areas that there is no best practice guidance. Edinburgh council is trying to develop a strategy, but has no idea about how to go about producing a best practice guide. Input from the Executive on guidelines would help.

Mr Gibson: Incidentally, convener, it was my esteemed colleague, Gil Paterson, who mentioned COSLA, not I.

Given the exceptionally high demand for plots in Edinburgh, what criteria do the witnesses use in allocating a plot? For example, is it based simply on somebody's position on the waiting list, or do you prioritise people who do not have gardens at their homes?

Tony Stanton: At present, people at the top of the waiting list are allocated allotments. That seems to be the fairest way. It might not be completely fair, because it does not allow for special interest groups to be provided for separately. Allotment provision in the city is inadequate at best—the area that is allocated to

allotments probably needs to be 200 per cent bigger than it is. Given the will, proper provision could and should be made. Land could be set aside to provide facilities for disabled groups and special learning groups, for instance. Where my allotment is, an area is set aside for a disabled group, but there is no special provision.

Out of town development of allotment gardens would not benefit those groups; they need to be catered for in their own communities, as do most allotment gardeners. People who suffer as a result of poor diet do not, generally, have cars or the inclination to travel out of town to set up an allotment or to work in an allotment for a day. They need somewhere they can walk to and where they can take the kids. School kids should be able to see the allotments and work in them so that the allotment becomes socially inclusive in the area in which those people live.

Mr Gibson: I realise that there is great pressure on land in Edinburgh, which is probably why more companies should invest in Glasgow and more people should move there. Given the exceptional demand, has your organisation identified any land that might be suitable for allotments? If so, has that been notified to the council and what was its response?

Tony Stanton: We have identified a major need for allotments on the south side of Edinburgh—an urban area where there is little or no provision. We have tentatively identified a couple of potential sites and we must involve the local communities; we do not want to frighten them off. The council is not actively pursuing acquisition of any sites for the provision of further allotments. In fact, as the result of a planning decision, it is about to close a site at Hawkhill, which is a small island of green and a haven for wildlife in a poorly provided-for area near the middle of the city, very near to Easter Road. It is not the best of spots, but the site is being developed for industrial purposes.

15:30

Mr Gibson: Would you like legislation that stipulated a minimum land requirement for allotments within urban areas?

Tony Stanton: Very much.

Mr Gibson: Do you have an idea about what that requirement would be? You mentioned a recommendation that was made in the 1950s of one plot to every 125 people. There is currently one plot to every 420 people. Should a minimum requirement be set in the same way, or should it be done on a hectare basis?

Tony Stanton: The demand for allotments outstrips supply by at least 100 per cent, and that is without advertising. In my view, the current

allotment provision needs to be increased. We have about 60 acres of allotments. I am not sure what that is in hectares—I am not metrically inclined. The figure needs to be nearer to 200 acres to cater for known and latent demand.

Iain Smith: Does your federation have any views about what would be the appropriate split between the responsibilities of the local authority—in the provision of allotments and of basic services to allotments—and the responsibilities of site or allotment owners in local associations or whatever?

Tony Stanton: Yes. The federation urged the City of Edinburgh Council to devolve management of sites to a number of local associations on a trial basis. That scheme has been running for close to 18 months now. There was to have been a report on the results of that trial after a year.

The situation is like the curate's egg—good in parts. The problem was the lack of council funding. For instance, we agreed to streamline the eviction process in the case of unsatisfactory tenants. My site was one of those that were given the status of devolved management—devolved in only a minor way, but it was a start. Part of the agreement was that the council would, on eviction of a tenant, clean up the plot and arrange for it to be handed over in good condition to the next punter on the list. That has never happened.

People come along, see an overgrown area and are disillusioned. They might knock their pans in trying to get it put right, but they still end up paying £30 for a weed plot, and paying for a weed-infested area is not a great idea. The allotment associations, including the bigger sites—at least the more active ones—would like a greater say in what happens. However, that will be a long process. Those associations have been very used to the council in effect running the show. It is a little difficult to try to get people to start running something when they can barely walk.

Another problem is that we no longer have a full-time allotments officer. We have a parks support officer who is supposed to look after 22 sites, but cannot possibly do so in the time that is allowed to him. One third of his time is, allegedly, allotted to allotments; the rest is for other duties. It is just not feasible for one man to look after the whole operation including advertising, promoting the system and trying to maintain a waiting list.

Iain Smith: What is the minimum level of service that a council would need to offer an allotment site so that local people could run it? Is help needed only with security and the provision of adequate drainage and water, or are other things required?

Tony Stanton: Obviously, there is a need for proper security, screening and water. The council

could provide that sort of thing. Most allotment sites have insufficient water to deal with present crop production because, increasingly, people are putting up glass houses and things of that nature. Those people need more water to extend the growing season to produce more food for themselves and their families. The supplies to many allotment sites are totally inadequate.

Those basic services need to be set up by the council. After that, the council could help local committees by producing literature—a welcome pack would be nice—to hand over to prospective new tenants so that they know what they have let themselves in for and who to go to if they have a problem.

At present, if you want to talk to the allotments officer or the parks support officer, you have to phone between 10 to 9 and 5 past 9, otherwise you will not get him. There used to be a message that told the caller to press button one to speak to so-and-so, button two to do something else, and then it would just go back round the loop—it would never finish and you could not leave any message. If you did not want to speak on any of the nominated topics, but simply wanted to speak to the guy himself about some development, you could not.

We need the council's support and, indeed, members' support in preventing a real problem—the installation of telephone masts for mobile phones. The council cannot do anything about that, and we cannot do anything about it. The Parliament will need to address the issue, because the masts are destroying the urban landscape.

Mr McMahon: I do not come from either Glasgow or Edinburgh, so I will not be biased in the way that Kenny Gibson was. However, regardless of where one is from, the matter of demand for land always comes up. You mentioned that expansion of the number of allotments in Edinburgh was required. However, there is also a demand for land for industrial, commercial and domestic properties. If X amount of land was set aside by the City of Edinburgh Council, demand for other developments would still exist. What would be gained on the one hand would be lost on the other, because the green belt would be affected by expansion of the urban area. How do you square that circle?

George Sutherland: One of the proposals that we have put forward is that every major housing development should include allotments. In a major housing development, there would be no industrial or commercial land, so there would be no conflict.

Tony Stanton: At present, large areas of grassland appear and are mown two or three times a year, which leaves unsightly lumps of wet

grass that are eventually dispersed by the wind. An allotment site would be a much better economic strategy for the people in the area.

Mr Paterson: I have a couple of questions on Caitlin DeSilvey's graph. It seems to show a hefty increase in demand for allotments. Is there a correlation between the drop in the number of allotments since the war and the number of people in Edinburgh who now own homes with gardens? Do a large number of people in your foundation own a home with a garden as well as have an allotment? Does that put pressure on people who live in tenements?

Tony Stanton: A high proportion of the population of Edinburgh live in tenement and flatted dwellings; they do not have a garden and they do not have an allotment, but they would like an allotment to get rid of the stress that accumulates in their working day, or even just to keep them out of the pub if they do not have a working day.

Caitlin DeSilvey: To answer the question about the post-war development of additional housing with gardens, it is probably true that some people who have a small garden attached to their home also have an allotment, because it is not feasible to grow vegetables in the small garden space included in some of the smaller post-war developments. It is probably a combination.

This is anecdotal, but I think that many of the people who are on the waiting list are younger people who would not traditionally be considered to be allotment-holder types, who live in flats and are not homeowners. There is no straight answer to the question.

I think that we have missed one of Gil Paterson's questions.

Mr Paterson: The red line on the graph shows a dramatic increase in the waiting list for allotments. Does that reflect the demand among young people who would not usually be associated with demand for allotments?

Caitlin DeSilvey: The graph reflects demand among a combination of people, but I think that many of them are younger folks who might not have gardened before and who do not have access to gardens with their homes.

The Convener: Thank you for that. A couple of points have come up, which have come up before. Security of tenure is an important issue. It is worth noting your comments about the budget in Edinburgh for allotments compared with the budget for other leisure activities—we put allotments under that umbrella.

I told the witnesses from Kelvinside Allotments Association that the committee would interview some people, mostly from the local authorities and

the Scottish Executive. We will then write a report, which I am sure you will read. If need be, we will be in touch with you again. Thank you for coming along and making your presentation.

We shall now hear from members of the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society: Ali Black, who is a member of SAGS and a Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations committee member; Martin Moonie, who is a member of SAGS and who will, I understand, be making the presentation; Gilbert Clark, who will join us in a moment; and Susan Burns, an allotment secretary.

15:45

Ali Black (Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society): We represent the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, which is the Scottish arm of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. SAGS is a constituted voluntary body funded entirely by its membership fees.

I thank the committee for holding this inquiry. We are concerned about the current position regarding allotments in Scotland and are pleased that the committee has provided this opportunity for us to come and give evidence.

I have had an allotment in the south side of Edinburgh since my late 20s. As the convener said, I am one of two FEDAGA representatives on SAGS. Gilbert Clark is the other FEDAGA representative on SAGS. He also served as a SAGS secretary during the 1980s. Gilbert started allotmenting in the 1940s and has witnessed at first hand the decline in allotment provision since that time. His first allotment, at Liberton, was privately owned and was taken over for housing development in the 1980s. He was involved in a lengthy campaign to save the site and is here today to answer questions that members might have about the background to allotments, present allotment legislation and his experiences in Liberton.

Unfortunately, our colleague Susan Burns has been taken ill and is not able to be with us today. She was going to answer questions on planning processes and national planning policy guidelines. I will endeavour to fill the gap but, I am afraid, not quite so expertly.

Dr Martin Moonie recently finished his doctorate in Oxford. He is one of our younger members and has played a leading role in establishing the SAGS website with funding from Scottish Natural Heritage. Martin does not have an allotment at the moment. He is on the waiting list in Edinburgh, but he hopes that there will still be allotments available by the time that his name gets to the top of the list. Martin is our main speaker and, without further ado, I shall ask him to present our vision of the

new role that allotments can play in our society and our recommendations for how that can be achieved.

Dr Martin Moonie (Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society): Martin has also spent the past two days in bed with flu, so you may hear me saying “adoption”, although I am trying to say allotments.

I want to start by mentioning the new plan for the national health service in Scotland, “Our National Health: A plan for action, a plan for change”, which was issued at the end of last year. As members will be aware, one of the main challenges that the plan presents is the requirement on the NHS to form closer links with local communities and local authorities to ensure community-based responses to health needs. Better planning and co-operation between the NHS, local authorities and the voluntary sector are also emphasised. The plan is emphatic in making its case for health promotion and disease prevention being every bit as important as cures. It offers a vision of a proactive health service that enables health through partnership, instead of one that simply treats illnesses once things have gone wrong.

SAGS sees allotments as having the potential to be central to any such programme of local authority and NHS fusion. In going through the plan, we were cheered to see that the visual imagery at least gave priority to the role that activities such as allotment cultivation can play in exercise and healthy living. Beside the slogan “Preparation for healthy older age should begin early in life”, gardening is shown as one of the key examples. As Judy Wilkinson and other speakers have already said, allotments are being used by people of all ages.

It is not just new NHS plans that could allow allotments to be given a new status in the policy departments of Scottish councils. Throughout the booklet that we have prepared for the committee, we have tried to outline the extent to which allotments impact on almost all areas of local authority activity, from the role of composting in waste management strategies to the promotion of biodiversity. As a kind of community centre in the open air, allotments have a role to play in social inclusion strategies. They are also places for education and training. Allotments can provide natural heritage resources and historical interest to urban development projects. I will pause on that point for a moment. Allotments in Nottingham have recently been awarded the same world heritage status accorded to Blenheim Palace and the Taj Mahal.

Allotments often suffer when development pressures send planners looking for potential building areas. As we have heard, allotments are easy targets for quick-fix approaches to housing

pressures. However, it surely goes without saying that retaining local interest and diversity is central to creating vibrant communities.

It is useful to compare two leaflets produced by the City of Edinburgh Council. In the first leaflet, which is for a heritage trail in the Gorgie/Dalry area, the social history of municipal baths, colony housing and football stadiums are used to create a rich sense of buzzing historical community. The second is the folded A4 leaflet that one receives when one applies to be put on the waiting list for allotments. In contrast to the first leaflet, and despite the age and historical interest of older sites, the second leaflet presents allotments largely as map locations. The document does not accentuate their role as working museums or nature reserves. No criticism of the City of Edinburgh Council is intended—I am using the example of the leaflets because they are symptomatic of the way in which allotments are viewed. Just as Gorgie City Farm and Victoria baths bring colour to the western side of Edinburgh, allotments such as those at Hawkhill, which we have heard are under threat, enliven the eastern side and add quantifiable quality to the lives of local residents.

Health and heritage are not the only ways in which allotments enhance Scottish cities. For instance, at Hamiltonhill in Glasgow, a wide range of initiatives is being developed to involve the immediate community and many of the socially excluded elements of society in allotment cultivation. In addition to working with groups such as ENABLE and the Scottish autistic school, the volunteers from the Groundwork community project have featured in *The Big Issue in Scotland*, partly as a result of their work with Glasgow move-on, an organisation that works with the homeless.

Hamiltonhill represents a new kind of allotment development which, by allocating plots to stakeholding organisations or their designated individuals, fuses social inclusion, health and community education in novel ways. I passed a Xerox of *The Big Issue in Scotland* article to the committee earlier this afternoon, but I am not sure whether members have it.

The Convener: Yes, we have copies.

Dr Moonie: The article's description of Hamiltonhill as

“social inclusion in its full muck-ridden, colourful excess”

neatly gives the sense of the potential for other allotments to be developed in the same way.

SAGS believes that there is room for many more sites like Hamiltonhill throughout Scotland and much scope for building on the best practice that Hamiltonhill manifests. However, Hamiltonhill is a special case, not least because formal staffing of

an allotment with youth and community officers is highly untypical. With that in mind, SAGS recommends that the Local Government Committee sets up a working party to rethink the future role of allotments in Scotland as a resource to provide such things.

SAGS is open to new ideas and suggestions. We would be glad to rethink the role of allotments in the 21st century, to include not just sites such as those in Kelvinside and Hamiltonhill, but to give consideration to the concept of urban farms, such as those found in many cities in North America, or European-style leisure gardens, ringing the green belts, which were envisaged for British allotments in the 1960s when Professor Thorpe undertook his inquiry for the then Minister of Housing and Local Government.

Underwriting all that is the fact that Scotland is short of allotment provision. That is a story that you will have heard already several times this afternoon. Bristol has a population of 0.5 million and about 120 allotment sites; it aims for a ratio of about one plot for every 150 residents—the council's target figure is 7 plots per thousand head of population. York has a population of a little more than 100,000 and has 1,150 plots. Edinburgh has roughly the same number of plots, but is a much bigger city.

One of the main subjects that a working party might want to address is the current legislation under which allotment provision is controlled. As members will be aware, allotment legislation is now between 50 and 100 years old and, in many cases, seems to relate to a world that no longer exists. Some examples are simply bizarre, such as the section of the Allotments (Scotland) Act 1892, which is still in force, that allows pigsties to be erected on any allotment in Scotland. To the best of my knowledge, pigs have never been permitted under English allotment legislation and I am not aware of any pigs currently being reared on Scottish allotments. The fact that the statute remains unamended gives some sense of the potential difficulty of applying existing allotment law to contemporary circumstances.

There are other, more serious examples of outdated legislation. For example, although the 1892 act obliges a council to consider allotment provision if six electors request it to do so, the act and its successors say very little about the way in which the adequacy of allotment provision may be monitored, nor do they specify any other triggers by which allotment provision would need to be reconsidered or otherwise monitored. As a result, SAGS has found that the considerable statutory powers that exist for councils to lease or otherwise acquire land for allotment provision are largely redundant or are rarely in regular use.

Our second recommendation is that Parliament

should develop consolidating legislation that simplifies, updates and enhances the current allotment legislation. Thirdly, SAGS recommends that all allotment sites should be protected from development under the terms of open space policies in local plans and that permission for any closure must be given by the Executive. Our fourth recommendation is that the Parliament should develop guidelines for allotment provision that reflect triggers for demand more obviously than current legislation. The question of housing stock transfer raises some significant issues. SAGS is very concerned that several sites could be under imminent threat, hence the focus on the reform of legislation in the recommendations.

In the course of the afternoon, we have heard a lot about the specific challenges facing allotments in Glasgow and Edinburgh. A working party on allotments would need to take more detailed evidence than the time this afternoon allows us to give but we believe that the items listed in our fifth recommendation are important first stages in ensuring good practice. Local authority guidelines should ensure: long-term site security of tenure; suitable management strategies; physical protection of sites and the promotion of allotments. SAGS would like private allotments to be considered at the same time as public allotments, although that may be beyond the remit of the Local Government Committee.

Finally, in recognition of the developing role that SAGS envisages for allotments in the coming century, we recommend that allotments are not simply included in strategic policy agendas, but are used as indicators in monitoring sustainability.

That is all I have to say. Thank you.

16:00

The Convener: Thank you. I appreciate that you were aware of the time. I hope that your throat gets better.

I have a couple of comments before I open up the meeting for some quick questions, because as you said in your presentation, we have gone over some of the issues with other groups. Your linking of health services with local authorities and social inclusion is good and is worth pursuing in terms of joined-up government. However, as a committee of the Parliament, we could not instigate a working group. We can recommend that a working group be set up, if that is what we decide to do once we have considered the evidence. That may or may not be what we will do, but I wanted to clarify that point.

Iain Smith: We have heard a lot of evidence today from the urban side of the allotment debate. How do the issues impact on smaller towns and rural communities? I am pleased to note in

passing that you are working with a private site in Newburgh in Fife, which is in my constituency. I am pleased that SAGS is involved outside the big cities.

Ali Black: SAGS has members from the north to the south, and from the west to the east of Scotland. We are mainly focused on the central belt at the moment, but we are trying hard to encourage other members to get involved in our organisation. One of the difficulties is that many of the small private sites do not come to light until they are threatened, by which time it is often too late. We are aware of another site in Kelty, which may be in your constituency. Although the people there have some contact with us, they are not formal members of SAGS.

Dr Moonie: Towards the end of our submission we note that we are working with a site in Cromarty but, like Ali, I am not able to comment extensively on the rural situation.

Iain Smith: Does your society have any indication of the extent of the shortfall and of the demand for allotments outwith the central belt? We have a lot of evidence on the problems in Edinburgh and Glasgow—I know that the bulk of allotments are in the larger cities—but how widespread are the problems in the rest of the country?

Ali Black: In Cromarty, a group of people have sought to have an allotment, but are unable to buy the land from the landowner on which to site it. There is demand, but we are unable to quantify it. We would like more detailed research on where the demand for allotments is.

Mr Gibson: Convener, I wish to put on record your kind offer of free potatoes from your allotment for committee members, which we discussed a few minutes ago.

Iain Smith asked the question that I was going to ask. Instead, I will ask whether you would like local authorities to carry out an audit of allotment sites. In your excellent submission, you say:

"When Cumbernauld House was sold, North Lanarkshire Council officials claimed they did not know that allotments had existed on the site for the last 17 years."

Would you like an audit to be carried out to find out what the situation is?

Ali Black: That would be helpful. I know that further down the committee's agenda today is consideration of the consultation paper on community planning. The community initiative role that local authorities will have if legislation is passed will give them a much wider remit to consider services provided by private sites, as well as their own allotment sites.

Mr Gibson: I realise that your colleague Susan

Burns is not here today, but how do you believe that planning legislation could be strengthened to protect and increase the number of allotments?

Ali Black: There is the potential for planning legislation specifically to require that allotment land be designated in local plans. I have statistics in front of me, which I could perhaps leave with your clerk, that detail the results of an analysis of land designations in the Edinburgh area. There are 12 different designations of allotment land among the various Edinburgh local plans, ranging from industry/business use, through housing and compatible use to green belt and green space. One of the difficulties facing allotments is that so many of them are designated in local plans under housing and compatible use. That does not provide them with the protection that they need under planning policies.

Mr Gibson: Would you like the Scottish Executive to carry out a cost-benefit analysis of how allotments benefit society, not just in terms of health but through work along the lines of the work at Hamiltonhill allotment—for recidivists or other people who have been in prison or young offenders institutions and so on?

Ali Black: That would be a very worthwhile exercise, although it would be difficult to do.

Gilbert Clark (Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society): I will add a general qualification to that point. Most things that are really worthwhile are not measurable. That applies to allotment sites.

Mr Gibson: Yes—I appreciate that it is about quality of life. Unfortunately, many things in politics have pounds, shillings and pence attached to them. It would be useful to show the health benefits in that way. It is hard to measure happiness on an index, but if it were possible to demonstrate that allotments benefit society more than they cost it—in terms of loss of land for housing or industrial development—that would help your case.

Gilbert Clark: I answer that by asking you to measure me: I have been happy for 60 years.

Mr Paterson: I could perhaps measure you by asking you about the lost land that you mentioned. Who owned that land? Was it council-owned property?

Gilbert Clark: Are you talking about the Liberton Brae site?

Mr Paterson: Yes.

Gilbert Clark: Certainly since 1890, the Liberton Brae site was owned by the Gilmore estates. It was occupied towards the end of the first world war during the submarine campaign. It remained compulsorily occupied and was rented out by the

council, which collected the rent for 72 years, until it gave its three-month notice to quit. We then found out that, as we were a little allotment society, we were not in fact owned by the council as we thought we were. Wimpey found it to be a little piece of valuable building land. We gave Wimpey a bit of a run for its purchase, with about eight appeals, including four to the Secretary of State for Scotland. Sadly, we lost in the end, principally because we were classified under houses and compatible land. We did not emphasise that strongly enough or appeal on that basis. In those days, we did not have the experience to say that allotments were compatible with housing.

Mr Paterson: Does the society know whether it is typically a mixed bag of organisations that put pressure on allotment land, or is it usually councils that sell the land?

Ali Black: Statistics from England and Wales seem to indicate that most privately owned sites have gone to housing. We know that, in Scotland, allotment sites tend to go to other open space use, rather than to housing. However, that is not the case for privately owned sites, which are particularly vulnerable to being bought for housing.

Dr Moonie: To answer that in a different way, there are 21 or 22 council sites and two private sites in Edinburgh. Historically, there were many more. We suspect that the private sites vanish more quickly, but increasingly, local authority sites are coming under an awful lot of pressure.

The Convener: Thank you for your contributions. The disadvantage of giving evidence last is that we have already covered some of the ground with other witnesses. However, you have made some interesting comments about having a cost-benefit analysis and an audit. You would seem to be suggesting a need for more joined-up government. Security of tenure was also an issue. We will see other people towards the summer, including council representatives, and we will visit an allotment. We will then write a report with recommendations.

Thank you very much for coming and for your time. I hope that your cold gets better.

Dr Moonie: Thank you.

The Convener: We will now have five minutes' break while the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care arrives.

16:09

Meeting adjourned.

16:17

On resuming—

Special Grant Reports

The Convener: The next item on the agenda is an evidence-taking session and debate on Special Grant Report No 1—Special Grant for Scotland Asylum Seeker Assistance (SE 2001/60) and Special Grant Report No 2—Special Grant for Scotland Kosovan Evacuees (SE 2001/61). We have been joined by Malcolm Chisholm, the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, and his officials John Storey, who is the head of community care branch 5, and John Brownlie, who is Mr Chisholm's private secretary.

The minister will make some introductory remarks, after which I will open the session up to members for questions of clarification only. Have members got that? I will then move to a half-hour discussion on the reports. Although the standing orders say that we can have 90 minutes, I think that 30 minutes will probably be enough—and from the look on Kenny Gibson's face, I think that he probably agrees with me. We might need less time than that, but will take more time if we need it. I will then ask the minister formally to move the motions, and everyone can speak for and against them.

I will now ask the minister to speak and I repeat that any questions after that are for clarification and information only.

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): Will I speak to and take questions on each report in turn?

The Convener: Yes.

Malcolm Chisholm: This afternoon, we are considering two special grant reports. They have much the same purpose, which is to give the Scottish Executive authority to pay grants under two schemes to local authorities in Scotland. In each case, the Executive will reimburse local authorities for expenditure that they have already incurred during the course of the current financial year. In each case, funding has come from down south to meet the costs being incurred, so grant is not being met from Scottish Executive resources.

Special Grant Report No 1 deals with asylum seekers. As members know, new arrangements for support of asylum seekers came into effect in April 2000. New asylum seekers are supported by the national asylum support service, given housing on a no-choice basis and issued with vouchers and a small amount of cash for their immediate living needs. I know the views that many members

have about that system, but that is beyond the scope of this report.

Special Grant Report 1 concerns asylum seekers who were here before April 2000. Historically, they have been supported by local authorities and they are still being supported by local authorities under the old system. The number of asylum seekers concerned was 610 at the end of January 2000, most of whom are concentrated in Edinburgh, which has 308 asylum seekers, and Glasgow, which has 225 asylum seekers. There are a further 77 asylum seekers outside the two major cities and, during 1999-2000, 19 other local authorities supported asylum seekers at one time or another.

The number of asylum seekers rose steadily during 1999-2000 and reached the January 2000 figure of 610. Our contacts with Edinburgh and Glasgow suggest that the number has remained at this level since. Those asylum seekers have applied to the local authority for support, given under powers in the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 to provide assistance to persons in need. Children of asylum seekers are also supported under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. The expenditure that local authorities incur in this way has been reimbursed in previous years by the Scottish Executive using these same special grant powers.

We are operating in exactly the same way for 2000-01, although there is one difference this year. In the past, we have set grant at a maximum of £165 a person. For reasons that are not entirely clear, that has diverged from the limits applying in England, where reimbursement has been limited to a maximum of £140 for each adult asylum seeker and £240 for each family. Last June, we notified local authorities in Scotland that those rates would also apply here, and Special Grant Report No 1 brings that into effect from 1 July. We understand that Edinburgh and Glasgow, while not welcoming this change, can live with it.

We have £5.1 million available to pay grant under Special Grant Report No 1, and this has been transferred by the Home Office to the Scottish assigned budget. We expect that that will be sufficient to pay all grant claims in full.

The Convener: I remind members that, at this stage, we are asking for points of information and clarification. This is not an opportunity for anyone to speak for or against a motion, which will be allowed under agenda item 5.

Mr Gibson: Is money that comes directly from the Home Office only for local authorities? If so, will there be additional moneys for the health service, for example? Obviously, in places such as Glasgow and Edinburgh that have a large number of asylum seekers, additional services might have

to be funded. Will there be compensation for that from the Home Office?

Malcolm Chisholm: That is outwith the scope of Special Grant Report No 1, which has nothing to do with the health service. It deals with money to local authorities.

Mr Paterson: I take it that you are talking about a sausage machine process with the same amount of money that is put in one end coming out of the other end. Is there a chance of there being a shortfall?

Malcolm Chisholm: The Home Office decides how much can be paid for asylum seekers. Scottish local authorities put in claims and might not need to claim up to the full amount. Today, we are approving the maximum amount of money that can be paid for each asylum seeker.

Mr Paterson: I understand now.

Mr Gibson: You talked about 610 asylum seekers and said that the figure would remain roughly at that level. There has been quite a bit of speculation that the figure will rise significantly. If so, do you anticipate that there will be additional resources from the Home Office to meet the costs?

Malcolm Chisholm: There has been a considerable increase in the figure over the past few months, and especially in the past few weeks. That is under the new system. Today we are discussing money for those people who claimed asylum before April 2000. The comparatively large increase—above 610—has happened under the new system. The funding of that will happen under a different system—that is well known—but we are not discussing that in the orders today.

Mr Gibson: Is £165 per asylum seeker adequate to meet all costs? You hinted that it was. Is there much room for manoeuvre there?

Malcolm Chisholm: People made claims against that total until this year. Although the amount has been reduced by the Home Office this year, Edinburgh and Glasgow have been claiming less than the old maximum of £165, which is why they are saying that they should be able to manage with the new amounts.

Mr Gibson: You said that Edinburgh and Glasgow could live with it. What does that mean?

Malcolm Chisholm: We have been talking to them. I undertake to keep doing so, because we want to monitor how the arrangement works. We have an indication that what they were paying out before was about £140—it may have been marginally more. I saw a note from Edinburgh that said that it was about 40p over that under the old system. That is the kind of figure that we are talking about. We will want to monitor how the new

amounts work in practice, just as we want to monitor how the new system is working later in the year.

The Convener: If there are no further points of clarification, I thank the minister for that and we move to the debate. Although we are allowed 90 minutes, I ask members to agree that we will not go over 30 minutes, unless it is absolutely necessary.

Malcolm, did you do both reports?

Malcolm Chisholm: No.

The Convener: It might be an idea to do the second one then. Sorry—I missed that.

Malcolm Chisholm: I deliberately kept them separate because this one is quite different.

Special Grant Report No 2 will allow the Scottish Executive to reimburse local authorities for costs incurred in 2000-01 in looking after refugees from Kosovo—315 refugees arrived in two flights into Prestwick airport on 9 May 1999. A further 34 people arrived on a medical flight into Glasgow airport on 2 July 1999. All those who arrived were vulnerable, either because of age—there were elderly and young children—or infirmity.

Those who arrived were initially housed on a short-term basis in reception centres. Children began attending school almost straight away. One of the lessons that has been learned from previous evacuations is that refugees should move out into the community fairly quickly, so that they have a more independent life and do not become institutionalised. Consequently, most refugees moved on after about three months to more permanent accommodation, with some continuing support where that was needed.

A special grant report laid before the Parliament last year made provision for reimbursing local authorities for expenditure incurred in the previous financial year, 1999-2000. Following parliamentary approval of the report on 1 March 2000, claims totalling £2.33 million were paid by the end of that month. The special grant report that is before the committee today is the means by which additional expenditure incurred by local authorities this financial year will be reimbursed. It is similar to last year's report, with minor rewording to reflect the fact that the programme was in a return to Kosovo—rather than arrival—phase during the year.

The wide range of expenditure categories for which local authorities can claim are set out at paragraph 2 to annexe A of the report. All categories that remain relevant from the previous report are kept in place. I should make it clear that Home Office policy is that eligibility for grant does not extend beyond the initial one-year exceptional leave to remain in the UK that evacuees were

granted. Consequently, paragraph 2 of annexe A of the report makes it clear that evacuees cease to be eligible for grant when their initial period of exceptional leave to remain has expired. For the bulk of evacuees to Scotland, that happened on 9 May 2000, or 2 July 2000 for those who arrived on the later medical flight.

We expect expenditure arising under this year's report to be a maximum of £800,000, payable to Glasgow, Renfrewshire and East Lothian. Some of that represents expenditure that was incurred last year but that was not claimed in time to make payment before 31 March. For example, expenditure of £171,000 by Glasgow falls into that category. I assure members that £800,000 is sufficient to meet both the remaining sums that are due for expenditure incurred last year and the additional expenditure that was incurred this year. Provision to cover those sums has been obtained from the Treasury's UK reserve.

16:30

The Convener: As members have no points of clarification that they wish to put to the minister on Special Grant Report No 2, I ask whether they are happy to have a formal debate of a maximum length of 30 minutes on both reports. Please indicate clearly for the benefit of the official reporters.

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We now move on to the formal debate of the first special grant report, but as no one wishes to question the minister further, I will ask the minister to move motion S1M-1601.

Motion moved,

That the Local Government Committee recommends that the Special Grant Report No 1 – Special Grant for Scotland Asylum Seeker Assistance (SE/2001/60) be approved.—*[Malcolm Chisholm.]*

The Convener: The question is, that motion S1M-1601, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: As no one wishes to say anything about the second special grant report, I invite the minister to move motion S1M-1602.

Motion moved,

That the Local Government Committee recommends that the Special Grant Report No 2 – Special Grant for Scotland Kosovan Evacuees (SE/2001/61) be approved.—*[Malcolm Chisholm.]*

The Convener: The question is, that motion S1M-1602, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: Thank you.

We now move into private session. I will allow a minute for members of the public in the gallery and the official reporters to leave. I thank the official reporters for their work today.

16:32

Meeting continued in private until 18:20.

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