

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 9 June 1999
(*Morning*)

Volume 1 No 8

£5.00

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 9 June 1999

(Morning)

[THE DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 10:30*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson): Good morning. Before we begin, members should check that their ID cards have been correctly placed in the microphone system. They can do so by looking at the red light immediately below the card and above the small arrow. If the card has been placed correctly, the light should be off.

The first item of business is a statement by the First Minister on legislation in the UK Parliament relating to devolved matters. The First Minister will take questions at the end of his statement and there should therefore be no interventions. The statement will be followed, no later than 11 am, by a debate on the consultative steering group report and the draft information strategy.

UK Parliament Legislation

10:31

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): With my light properly off, I would like to make a statement on future legislation by the Westminster Parliament about matters that are within the legislative competence of this Parliament.

Following devolution, the Westminster Parliament will retain its competence to legislate about all matters. That will include matters that are within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament. In a devolved system, it could not be otherwise.

However, the United Kingdom Government has made it clear that it expects a convention to be established whereby Westminster would not usually legislate on devolved matters in Scotland without the consent of the Scottish Parliament. Lord Sewel made that clear on 21 July last year during consideration of the Scotland Bill by the House of Lords. In a memorandum of evidence to the House of Commons Procedure Committee last November, the President of the Council indicated that the Government expected the convention to be adopted for all public bills.

In addition, the Scottish Executive expects that the UK Government will oppose any private member's bill that seeks to alter the law on devolved subjects unless it is clear that the proposal has the support of the relevant devolved body. That is also the position of the UK Government. In its report on the procedural consequences of devolution, published on 24 May, the Procedure Committee stated that it supported the principles behind Mrs Beckett's statement and agreed that the House should not legislate without the consent of the devolved legislature concerned.

Members may find it helpful if I explain how we envisage that the process of seeking consent will work in practice. Where the Scottish Executive and the United Kingdom Government agree that a policy in a devolved area should be given effect by an act of the Westminster Parliament, it would be for the Scottish ministers to put the proposal to the Scottish Parliament, and for the UK Government to manage its business at Westminster in a way that is consistent with the convention.

The usual rule will be that legislation about devolved subjects in Scotland will be enacted by the Scottish Parliament. From time to time, however, it may be appropriate for a Westminster act to include provisions about such matters. That might be the case, for example, where the two Administrations agree that there should be one regime of regulation with application on a UK-wide or GB-wide basis.

An example of when we expect to introduce such a measure is that of the proposed bill to establish a food standards agency to operate on a UK-wide basis. Earlier this year, the UK Government published a draft bill that made it clear that the Scottish Parliament's consent would be sought for that proposal. I do not want to be taken on to the specifics of that case today, but let me make it clear that the Parliament will have the opportunity to debate fully that and other relevant issues at the appropriate time. Indeed, I expect that the issue will be debated before the summer break.

A small number of additional measures may also be introduced at Westminster during this session, dealing essentially with reserved areas but with some impact in devolved areas. The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill is a UK measure designed to equalise the age of consent for homosexuals and heterosexuals, and to introduce a new offence of abuse of trust. It was introduced to the Westminster Parliament in December last year and defeated in the House of Lords in April this year. The UK Government is likely to reintroduce the bill, making use of the Parliament Acts to ensure its passage. That means that the bill that is reintroduced would have to be identical to the one that was defeated. Therefore, even if it were thought desirable, it will not be possible to remove Scotland from the bill's scope if the Parliament Acts are invoked.

Until the UK Government and Parliament have concluded the existing legislative process, it is logical to regard it as unfinished Westminster business. However, these are devolved matters of some sensitivity. It is essential that this Parliament should have the opportunity to debate the Scottish provisions of the bill. We shall therefore provide for a debate in Executive time. I and my colleagues in the Executive will argue in that debate that the powers under the Parliament Acts should be used if that is thought appropriate by the United Kingdom Government.

We have reached that conclusion in the knowledge that this Parliament will have the power, if it so wishes, to amend or repeal any Scottish provision enacted by the passage of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill.

As members are aware, there are a number of bills currently before the United Kingdom Parliament which make provision about matters that are to be within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament. The proceedings of some of these bills will still be in train on 1 July. A paper describing the bills that are expected to be enacted in this way is available to members from the document supply centre. When I finish, that document will also be available at the back of the chamber, as will a copy of my statement.

The bills include, for example, the Health Bill, the Water Industry Bill and the Pollution Prevention and Control Bill. The Health Bill will enable the completion of the reforms set out in the white paper "Designed to Care". In particular, it provides for the abolition of general practice fundholding, for changes in the financial arrangements for national health service trusts and for the imposition of a duty of quality on the NHS in Scotland. In addition, it includes measures to tackle fraud in the NHS and to require all primary care practitioners to have indemnity cover.

The Water Industry Bill will establish the water industry commissioner for Scotland and wind up the present Customers Council. The Pollution Prevention and Control Bill makes provision to ensure that the EC Directive on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control is implemented on time.

There are also several bills with limited, specific provision about matters that will be within the competence of this Parliament. For example, the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill is largely concerned with reserved matters, but includes provisions in the area of family law to allow the sharing of pensions between divorced couples.

It is the view of the Scottish Executive that it is right for the remaining stages of these bills to be completed at Westminster. They are, in the view of the Executive, necessary bills. Not to let them proceed at Westminster would mean halting consideration of them now, only to start again after the Scottish Parliament takes up its full powers on 1 July. In practice, that would mean no progress until the autumn at the earliest.

I stress that Scottish ministers are being consulted fully by the UK Government about the progress and handling of this legislation, and it will be for the Scottish ministers to exercise any ministerial powers and duties within devolved competence that are conferred by the bills. In doing so, they will, of course, be accountable to this Parliament.

Importantly in this context, I remind members that the Scottish Parliament will be able to amend or repeal legislation made at Westminster in so far as its provisions fall within this Parliament's competence. That is the case for existing legislation, for this session's bills at Westminster that affect Scotland and for future acts of the UK Parliament.

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): I thank the First Minister for providing copies of his statement in advance. That was very helpful. I think that we can agree that some of the current bills, particularly those in the House of Lords, are non-controversial and nearing the end of their process. It is sensible to let them

proceed, but we must lay down a caveat for the future. Allowing those bills to be completed at Westminster is not and cannot be a precedent. After the transition period is over, that must not happen again.

That brings us to future bills. The SNP view is that the United Kingdom Government should not legislate on devolved matters; they are devolved precisely because it is our job to legislate on them. The First Minister referred to the possibility of agreement between the two Parliaments. Does he accept, however, that an agreement in principle is not the same as the process of enacting a bill? We all know, particularly those of us who have been in Westminster, that vast changes—usually as a result of Government amendments—can be made to a bill before it becomes an act. Agreement in principle is not a satisfactory substitute for our scrutinising the detail of the legislation.

It is not good enough for the First Minister to say that we can repeal legislation later; he knows as well as we do that there is a great inertia factor in repealing existing statutes. It is fundamental that the Government should say now that it is not going to use its powers under section 28 of the Scotland Act 1998 to interfere with this Parliament's prerogatives.

I want to mention some of the other bills that are going through Westminster, particularly those that deal largely with reserved matters but that also touch on devolved matters. The First Minister mentioned the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, but I would like to refer to the Immigration and Asylum Bill. It has yet to receive its third reading in the House of Commons and to go through all its stages in the House of Lords, so it will probably not be on the statute book before the House of Commons recess at the end of July.

We all agree that immigration is a reserved matter, even if we do not agree with the content of the bill. It amends some Scottish legislation in devolved areas, particularly the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, which is the founding act of Scotland's social work system. Section 12 of that act puts a duty on local authorities to assist people in need, either in cash or in kind. The Immigration and Asylum Bill will amend it by inserting a provision that says:

"A person subject to immigration control is not to receive assistance because he is destitute".

I hope that no member of this Parliament came here to deny assistance to any category of person on the ground that that person was destitute. Labour members spent much time yesterday saying that they wanted to discuss what was happening out in the community rather than what was happening in this chamber. Here is something that we can decide for ourselves. I ask

the First Minister to tell his colleague Mr Straw that we in Scotland are quite capable of deciding for ourselves our own social work rules. We were not elected here to follow some neo-Conservative agenda to deny assistance to those who are destitute.

The First Minister: I am grateful for the first few sentences of Alasdair Morgan's remarks. It is sensible that we should deal with the transitional provisions pragmatically. That is what I am recommending to the Parliament.

Mr Morgan refers to the Immigration and Asylum Bill, which is before the United Kingdom Parliament. It deals almost entirely with reserved matters, and as such will continue its passage through the House of Commons and presumably through the House of Lords. What its fate will be is a matter for those two chambers and the parliamentary process.

I am setting out the system that will operate in the future; what we do now is not necessarily a precedent. United Kingdom legislation that deals with both a devolved and a reserved area of responsibility will go through the Westminster system only if this chamber agrees to it. That is an important safeguard. On occasion, there may be disagreements in this Parliament about whether it is right to give such agreement, but that is entirely a matter for this chamber. If it does not consent, business at Westminster will have to be adapted to take account of that.

Mr Morgan seems to be asking me to say that, as a matter of principle, we will on no occasion allow a Westminster bill to go through, even though it is evident to all of us that it is sensible that its provisions should apply on either a GB-wide or a UK-wide basis. That would build inflexibility into our system. It would be counter-productive, and I would not agree with it.

Mr Morgan refers to an inertia factor that would prevent us from altering a provision that had come through the Westminster machinery even though there may be a wish to use a power in a devolved area. That is a criticism of this Parliament. The powers exist, if the Parliament wants to use them, and it is for those who are arguing for change to overcome any inertia. I hope that the SNP will not take this as too much of a compliment, but the word inertia is not one that I would apply to it. I do not know whether SNP members will win the argument, but they are certainly entitled to put their point of view.

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): I am happy to accept the principle that the Scottish Parliament should give its consent on future bills that would apply on a UK-wide basis. Unlike the Scottish National party, the Scottish Conservatives, as a unionist party, have no problem in accepting that

some acts—even those that cover devolved areas—should be enacted uniformly across the UK.

The establishment of the food standards agency is a clear case in point. As we stated in our manifesto, there should be a common standard across the whole of the UK to ensure that our producers, processors, retailers and restaurateurs are not subject to more stringent regulations than those that apply elsewhere in the UK. The First Minister said that he did not wish to go into specifics, but one of the specifics that relates to the food standards agency will be the method by which it is funded. I give notice that we are wholly opposed to the proposal that the agency should be funded by a flat-rate levy and we will oppose that when it comes before the Scottish Parliament for deliberation. I hope that other parties will support us in our opposition to that corner shop tax, which would mean that small local shops would pay the same amount as large supermarkets to fund the agency. The First Minister should invite the Westminster Government to revisit the issue.

That issue will put the coalition parties in some difficulty again, because the Liberal Democrats were unusually adamant when they said in their manifesto:

"We will abolish the flat rate levy on Scottish food premises to fund the Agency."

One of their candidates, Mr Mackie, was so disappointed with that proposal that he suggested the introduction of VAT on food as an alternative funding mechanism.

On the issue of the food standards agency and its funding, will the coalition parties be free to differ or will the principle of collective responsibility apply to the coalition Government? Alternatively, as with tuition fees, will we have yet another committee of inquiry to try to get some people off the hook?

I am unhappy with the arrangements that have been announced by the First Minister to deal with current bills in progress at Westminster. I believe that the principle that the Scottish Parliament should give its consent should apply to those current bills that cover devolved areas. During the election campaign, we indicated that we were unhappy that the Health Bill—which covers one of the principal devolved functions of this Parliament and involves the expenditure of one third of the total Scottish Office block—was to be discussed and determined at Westminster.

Given that this Parliament operates on a different time scale from the one at Westminster and will resume its deliberations in September, will the First Minister make time available under Executive business for the Scottish Parliament to express a view on the Health Bill and the other bills in progress? I think that it would be arrogant

to proceed otherwise—if we applied the principle of consent and debate to all bills, we would set down an important marker.

The First Minister: I am grateful for the support in principle that I received from David McLetchie, but he rather spoiled it with his subsequent remarks.

I am grateful, too, for David McLetchie's remarks about the handling of the food standards agency. I understand that there is considerable controversy about the funding levy and its mechanics. I said that I did not want to be drawn into specifics and I will hold to that, because I hope that, before we rise, there will be an opportunity to discuss the levy during a debate on the food standards bill. The matter of the levy may well be revisited, but although it is easy to say that there ought to be a graduated levy, practical problems would arise over its definition. I will be interested to hear the Conservative party's solution to those problems when the time comes.

I proposed that the current bills to which I referred, particularly the Health Bill, should be allowed to continue their progress as a matter of convenience; otherwise, we will have to halt everything and start again. The bill can be inspected when it reaches the statute book; if something is thought to be so controversial that it is worth changing, this Parliament can take steps. I do not believe that that will be the view of this Parliament, but that is a matter for debate. I do not intend to have a debate on the issue, but if David McLetchie believes that there should be one, he should argue his case with the Parliamentary Bureau.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): The legislation to impose tuition fees for higher education and to abolish student grants was passed by the Westminster Parliament, but those subjects are now to be considered by a committee of inquiry under the so-called partnership agreement. Will the First Minister give an absolute assurance that the Scottish Parliament will be free to legislate on those matters, given that the majority of members were elected on a commitment to abolish tuition fees and that many of us also want student grants to be restored, particularly for students from low-income families?

The First Minister: That matter has nothing to do with the statement I have made. As Dennis Canavan knows, it is a devolved area of responsibility over which, therefore, this Parliament has powers.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I am deeply concerned about the Immigration and Asylum Bill, which is currently going through the House of Commons. The First Minister mentioned that most of the bill covers reserved matters. However,

clause 105 amends the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 to prohibit asylum seekers from gaining housing under the act's homelessness provisions. The amendment of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 has been mentioned; the bill also amends the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984, to prevent local authorities from making arrangements for the mental health care of asylum seekers. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is being amended to prevent local authorities from providing support to children of asylum seekers.

The First Minister talks about the ability to repeal legislation, and expresses concern about the possible inertia of this Parliament. However, a series of acts is involved—does the First Minister agree that it would be easier to persuade Jack Straw to remove those clauses at this stage than for us to have to go back to amend several acts as a result of legislation that is currently going through the House of Commons?

The First Minister: Fiona Hyslop will remember that asylum and immigration are reserved matters, on which the Westminster Parliament passes legislation. She may not like that fact, but she will have to accept that it is part of the division of responsibility within the United Kingdom.

Fiona Hyslop will also remember that there are Scottish members at Westminster who have substantial interests in these matters and who will no doubt consult Scottish local authorities and others and represent their points of view. Her party has a number of MPs at Westminster; she will no doubt urge them to put forward a point of view if she thinks it important for them to do so.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): On the Access to Justice Bill, will the First Minister make a statement about the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission? I am unhappy about a number of the restrictions that have been imposed in relation to legal aid, as they represent an infringement of civil liberties and justice, but I am glad that the bill will remove the merits test for granting legal aid in cases that the commission refers to the appeal court.

I have a specific interest in some of the dozen or so cases that are currently before the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission, including that of Thomas Campbell and Joseph Steele, and that of Stuart Gair. The First Minister will be aware that the commission can recommend that a case be returned to the appeal court, but that the Scottish Office has been able to refuse such a recommendation. Will he state whether such recommendations will be accepted without political interference?

The First Minister: That is way beyond the matter under discussion. I might find myself in trouble with the Deputy Presiding Officer if I were

to initiate a debate about the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission, but I hope that I will be allowed to say that, as a Scottish politician and a lay person, I am delighted to have got myself out of the responsibility of making decisions on such matters at one remove. The point of the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission is to take over such functions. It must exercise its judgment in light of the law of Scotland and the available evidence. I would not want to comment on any particular case.

The Access to Justice Bill is an example of why we want our measures to go through. It corrects an anomaly and, for the first time, makes legal aid available in cases referred to the Court of Appeal by the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission. Mr Sheridan should approve of that. It will also enable recipients of the disability working allowance to be exempt from the financial eligibility and contributions tests for advice and assistance from solicitors.

The rigid, nationalistic point of view would be that we could not accept the legislation now but should wait for a year, or for however long, until we can find the time to legislate. Common sense, however, tells us to let such worthwhile, non-controversial and widely welcomed matters to go through under the arrangements that I have outlined.

Consultative Steering Group

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson): We will now move on to the debate on motion S1M-39, in the name of Henry McLeish, on the consultative steering group report. The debate should conclude at around 12:20 pm and, while I do not intend to impose time limits on members' speeches, I might review the position later on.

10:56

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish): As the former chairman of the consultative steering group on the Scottish Parliament, I am pleased to move the motion this morning but I am no more equipped to talk on the CSG recommendations than others who are present: the Deputy First Minister was a member of the group, as was other Deputy Presiding Officer, Mr Reid. I do not know if it is a convention of the chamber to refer to other parts of the building but we have other members of the group with us as well.

We have an hour and a half to discuss some important business and, if possible, we should concentrate on the principles that underpin the motion before us. I also want to explain where we are in relation to the report and its suggestions. It is important that we acknowledge the tremendous groundwork that the CSG laid in creating a vision of a modern and accessible Parliament and endorse the four key principles that are at the root of the group's recommendations.

The first principle is that power should be shared between the Parliament, the Executive and the people of Scotland. That is what all the parties championed throughout the election campaign and it is becoming a reality.

The second principle is that the Executive should be accountable to the Parliament and the Parliament to the people of Scotland. After the previous weeks, I have no doubt that that is happening. The Executive will be much more accountable to the Parliament in Scotland than the Government is to the Parliament in Westminster. We all support that and want to work to ensure that it is a success. The Parliament has substantial powers, something which I support, and I am sure that those powers will be exercised responsibly and that the partnership of the people, the Executive and the Parliament can march forward together.

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): As the minister knows, I welcome most of the recommendations in the CSG report. With regard to parliamentary accountability, am I right in thinking that the CSG intended that there should

be an ability specifically to question the First Minister? Can Henry McLeish enlighten the chamber as to whether that would be done at open question time, or whether there would be the highly desirable possibility of the First Minister facing questions, not just from the Leader of the Opposition, but from any member?

Henry McLeish: That all ministers, including the First Minister, should be fully accountable to the Parliament is in the spirit of the CSG recommendations and concurs with Alex Salmond's comments. I hope that that will be the case in question time, which will run from next week. The important point is that we have suggested the initial set-up. I hope that we will review that in co-operation with other parties, because no one wants to run away from their responsibilities. Alex Salmond is absolutely right: a place in the new Scottish Executive carries enormous responsibilities. I hope that all members will be able to question not only the First Minister, but all members of the Executive.

The third principle at the root of the CSG's recommendations is that the Parliament should be open, accessible and participative. Looking around the chamber, it is encouraging to see that people are looking in on what we are doing. Again, we are marching forward from what happens at Westminster. That is a serious indication about our ability to be open, accessible, and, as the debate unfolds, to have the maximum number of people participating in the policy and work of the Parliament.

The fourth principle is that, in its operation, the Parliament should embrace equal opportunities for all. I take very seriously the point made by Alex Salmond yesterday; people from ethnic minority backgrounds participated in the election campaign, but none was successful in becoming an MSP. Obviously, we must examine that carefully, because there is no point in embracing the idea of an inclusive Scottish Parliament if people from every walk of life and every ethnic background cannot participate in the work that we are doing. Ideas such as that of Alex Salmond should be given serious consideration in the work of the committees and the Parliament.

Reflecting on the last four weeks and on the spirit of the CSG, it is clear that there have been some tough times, some tensions and some ill-tempered debate. We should all look back, briefly, on the 100 years since the campaign for the Scottish Parliament began. Over the short space of four weeks, that campaign is fast becoming a reality; every MSP should take some credit for that. In terms of the quality and tone of the debates, we have a long way to go. However, as we establish ourselves, we should consider how much we have achieved over the past few weeks,

even if, at times, that is not always obvious.

I do not think that I am being over-optimistic when I say that all the principles that I have detailed this morning are acceptable to every member. They are fine principles and the CSG has managed to transform them into sensible recommendations for our working practices. They are the foundation of many of the ideas for Scottish parliamentary practice, which have so captured the imagination of the wider public. Again, I refer to some of the opinion polls that have been taken. When taking over such a huge responsibility, we are all slightly apprehensive. Although there is a long way to go, it seems that initial indications from members of the public suggest that they like what they see. Once more, that should spur us to continue to march forward with the new politics.

How do the CSG recommendations fit into the wider context of our work? First, the main thrust of the group's recommendations was turned into transitional standing orders—under which we are currently operating—that answer a concrete concern shared by us all. Secondly, other CSG recommendations related to the practical aspects of implementing the parliamentary project, such as the establishment of the education centre, and those are currently being developed by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

We have the standing orders, the practical ideas that are being developed and, of course, there are other detailed recommendations from the expert panels that advised the CSG, which will be taken forward separately in the coming months. An example of that is the regulation of members' interests; the CSG recommendation is reflected in an interim transitional order, which will apply until the Parliament considers how it wants to regulate the conduct of members in the long term. That important matter will be debated in the near future.

Over the past few years, there has been a wide-ranging debate about how members conduct themselves in—and outside—Parliament. We want to be an exemplary Parliament, and to show the rest of the world that we have the highest degrees of probity and standards. This chamber will consider that matter, although, at present, we are working to transitional orders that were set down by Westminster as part of the transition process.

Similarly, the recommendations of the financial issues advisory group will be discussed in detail when the Parliament considers the financial procedures that it wishes to adopt. An excellent aspect of the consultative steering group's work was that it ensured that this Parliament could take decisions. There have clearly been some frustrations that decisions have been taken by the UK Government in Westminster prior to the

establishment of this Parliament. However, the 129 members of this Parliament will revisit all those decisions and it should reassure everyone that we will decide what procedures we will operate within.

The aspirational aspect of the consultative steering group's work—its commitment to the four key principles—is the subject of today's debate. By voicing our active endorsement of the consultative steering group and of the motion, we will voice the Parliament's support for the ideas that underpin the practical details of daily business.

I mentioned that the extensive consultation process was one of the most reassuring elements of the work of the consultative steering group, as it indicated that our deliberations were very much in line with the aspirations of Scottish society. The process took many forms, including a written consultation exercise, a series of open forum meetings and workshops aimed at eliciting the views of groups, such as young people and those who live in urban, deprived and remote areas, which traditionally perceived themselves as being marginalised from the decision-making process. To add to Alex Salmond's point, I cannot overemphasise that, while we have listened through the consultative steering group, if this is to be a Parliament for all of Scotland it is imperative that every one of the 129 members continues to take the idea of consultation on board. If we can recognise that all of the wisdom of Scotland does not reside in this chamber alone, that will be a massive and important change in our culture.

When colleagues note the consultative steering group's recommendations, they are noting the recommendations of the people of Scotland for an open, modern and dignified Parliament. In my view, the three elements of Scotland moving forward together steals a march on Westminster, and, as we are building on modern European Parliaments, it also gives Scotland a great chance to do things differently as we enter the new millennium.

I used the word dignified, which relates not only to the ceremonial aspects of the Parliament, but to the atmosphere in which we conduct our business. Even in the early weeks of the Parliament, the quality of debate and of the exchanges between MSPs has been different—I stress the word different. At times, the debate has been good; at other times, it has been patchy. However, this is our Parliament, this is our way of doing things, and I have no doubt that we should take collective credit for some of the changes. For example, by electing the Presiding Officer and the First Minister, we have put those posts before the Scottish Parliament, whereas, in Westminster, the Cabinet does not go before the Parliament. Such

examples are small but important indications that this Parliament is very different, and reflect both what the people of Scotland want and the relationship between the Parliament and the Executive.

We have a set of standing orders, and, although there have been some hiccups, they can be ironed out. That reflects the work of the consultative steering group, which anticipated what we would want to do and how we would want to do it. Canon Kenyon Wright said that the Scottish Parliament should be viewed as a relationship rather than as an institution. I am plagiarising what he said, but it is a good metaphor, as we should always remember that we are linked to others, and that it matters to people when we take decisions. Although people may criticise the Parliament and its budget of £16 billion, one of the important aspects of devolution is that we have extensive legislative powers and a huge responsibility. Once the new Scottish Parliament passes an act, it will have a formidable impact on every one of the 5 million people in Scotland and on every part of Scotland.

One area of concern for the consultative steering group was the creation of a family-friendly environment, keeping family-friendly hours. I hope that that environment will apply to work not only in the Parliament but in civic Scotland and in our constituencies.

Another element of the Parliament, which was endorsed yesterday, are the massive powers that we will rightly give to committees. They mean that no one need complain that an Executive is simply taking decisions on behalf of Scotland; each of the 129 MSPs will have a significant role in the committee structure. That also was one of the objectives that the CSG set out.

I believe that the spirit of the CSG was one of consensus and consultation although, as I said earlier, it does not often seem as if those two qualities are found in abundance. Nevertheless, the demonstration of those qualities is an objective that we must set ourselves.

I want to finish on the issue of civic participation in our work. I know that young people are concerned about establishing a youth parliament and that other people want a civic forum to be established. The Executive, and I hope this Parliament, will warmly endorse both ideas. Over the next few months, we need to think about how we can interface with such organisations, how we can help them to get established and how we can give them concrete support. That will take the process of consultation and consensus further and will send a very firm message to the people of Scotland that we want civic Scotland to be involved in our work. The CSG also identified that objective, and I hope that the Parliament will

warmly embrace it.

With those brief remarks, I will open up this debate on the CSG report to the chamber. I hope that, when we review the position in perhaps a year's time, we will have been able to bed down some of the main recommendations of the report. I also hope that we will have proved to the people of Scotland that this Parliament was worth the 100-year campaign and that they should start to ensure that the Parliament works for them.

I move,

That the Parliament records its appreciation of the work of the Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament; acknowledges the contribution which the Group's Reports have made to the development of the procedures of the Parliament; and agrees that its operations should embody the spirit of the CSG key principles.

11:11

Mr George Reid (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): This Parliament does not belong to the politicians; ownership of this Parliament is vested solely in the people of Scotland. The consultative steering group grasped that fundamental principle. It saw that, in order to grow a new political culture, how this legislature functions was not just a matter of striking a balance between the Executive and the Parliament, but of shared decision making and the empowerment of the Scottish people. Above all, such a new culture had to involve those people in Scotland who had been excluded for far too long: women, young people, the one in 10 Scots with a disability, and all our ethnic minorities. As Mr McLeish rightly said, Parliament is not the sole source of policy development or expertise and those excluded voices should also be heard.

The CSG saw that participation is the star by which to steer this Parliament. This morning, some of the group's members sit in the distinguished visitors' gallery. Their organisations—trade unions, local authorities, the business community, the Churches and our vibrant voluntary sector—represent civic Scotland's enduring strength. In the bleak years after 1979, they were a light in the darkness. In the first referendum, we Scots were feart; but, in the second referendum, thanks in large part to those organisations, we had the courage to embark on a process of constitutional change.

I have spoken to my former CSG colleagues about the first month of the Parliament. One said, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." She is pleased with our openness and informality, but is less happy with some of our inherited Westminster ways. Mercifully, the recent awkwardities over allowances are now behind us and, in the weeks leading up to vesting day, I urge members to reflect on the motion in the names of

Mr McLeish and Mr Wallace.

There are many questions to answer. How do we share power with the people of Scotland? How do we devise a participative form of governance appropriate to the 21st century in a small country with tight lines of communication? How, at a pre-legislative stage, do we collect voices; and how, at a post-legislative stage, can we find out how our decisions are working in practice?

The CSG has produced many models of best practice that have been culled from the Commonwealth and the European Union. I have no doubt that our committees will now take off and find a life of their own. Committees will be able to draw on expert assessors to participate in and inform their discussions. They will be able to convene their own citizens panels, and their reporters—called rapporteurs in Europe—will, as in Europe, be the focal point for minority interests.

The issue of most concern to civic Scotland is the establishment of a civic forum. I welcome Mr McLeish's assurance that the Executive is investigating ways of giving it concrete assistance and support. The CSG saw the forum as a

"significant means of achieving an accessible Parliament within a participative democracy."

All parties, pre-election, endorsed the concept of the forum, as did the coalition agreement of 14 May. More than 600 organisations from all walks of civic life have now formally registered an interest. The civic forum will promote participation, facilitate debate and ensure social partnership. It will be a gateway to the Parliament and its Executive, not a gate-keeper.

The forum urgently needs a commitment of resources to establish itself as an independent body, to kick-start its work programme over the summer months and to enable it to recruit a small core staff team. High subscription levels will deter participation. Without some initial support from the Parliament it is difficult to see how the forum can get going. In his concluding remarks, Mr Wallace may flesh out what concrete assistance means. Is this a matter solely for the Executive? As a service to the Parliament, might not the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body and, if we decide to establish one, a committee of conveners be involved too? Does the minister accept that planning for the forum must start as soon as possible? Will he consider introducing a three-year package of core support?

When the CSG report was published, the Deputy First Minister said that he was passionate for participation. In his concluding remarks, he can assure the chamber that his passion remains unabated and is going to be resourced.

11:17

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): My party is happy to endorse many of the proposals in the CSG report, which has been presented and forms the basis of today's motion. We think that it will form an excellent basis for the working of the Parliament. I pay tribute to all those who were involved in its production and in particular to Mr McLeish, who took on the onerous task of chairing the group's many meetings and steered it to a successful conclusion. Although I do not appear in the title credits, I had the opportunity to come off the substitutes bench one day to deputise for Paul Cullen, our representative on the CSG, at one meeting of the CSG. I was warmly welcomed and enjoyed the discussions.

This debate provides a timely opportunity to consider the way in which the Parliament has operated so far. If we are being honest, it has not lived up to its billing. We heard so much about the much-vaunted new politics in the run-up to the Scottish elections that the phrase had become a cliché even before the Parliament started. That pales into insignificance when we compare it with the number of times that the phrase has been invoked in the chamber. It has become the motherhood and apple pie of Scottish politics.

Although I may be struck down for saying so, new politics has been a complete sham. So far, there has been a deal cooked up behind the backs of the voters that betrayed Scottish students on tuition fees, sold out our farmers over beef on the bone and sold our fishermen down the watters on the Scottish fisheries issue. There has been a huge growth in the size of government in Scotland, with 22 ministers, 12 special advisers and a whole retinue costing the Scottish taxpayer some £5 million. There have been disgraceful attempts by the coalition to suppress opposition to their cosy deal, whether it be on Short money or on members' allowances, which we discussed yesterday.

In the spirit of consensus politics, I have come up with a solution to the parity problem, which so engaged us yesterday. It is really rather simple: Labour and Liberal Democrat members will take their office allowances in euros; SNP and Conservative members will take theirs in pounds sterling; and we can rest assured that market forces will achieve parity in very short order.

Some people in this Parliament do not like plain speaking. However, I prefer to deal in the truth; and, as we all know, the truth sometimes hurts. The truth, however blunt, is infinitely preferable to euphemisms such as consensus, co-operation and new politics. Some people use those words as a mask for blatant political opportunism, as we have heard on too many occasions in the three weeks or so that this Parliament has been in

operation. I do not call that new politics; I call it dishonest politics. We in the Scottish Conservative party will have nothing to do with it.

We must be wary of the phrase consensus politics and of elevating the whole concept of consensus, because it can be a false god. Consensus politics, if it means the politics of the lowest common denominator, is no way to take any country or nation forward. It results in the consensus of inertia and it results in paralysis by analysis. It is worth reflecting that 350,000 council houses in Scotland would not have been sold with consensus politics—

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP) *rose*—

David McLetchie: —and it is worth reflecting that the new emphasis on choice and standards in education—Mr Sheridan, unlike the poor drivers on other benches, I am always happy to give way.

Tommy Sheridan: Mr McLetchie has given us a presentation that referred to honesty. He then referred to council housing. I hope, therefore, that he will join me in hoping that the courts in England will not, in dealing with his former friend Mr Aitken, be so forgiving as they were to his former friend Mr Saunders, who, after being given a five-year sentence, served only 18 months. Mr Aitken offered a defence that was remarkable in connection with council housing. He said that he suffered from severe chronic asthma and therefore should not be sent down. If that defence were accepted by the district courts in Glasgow, they would have a hell of a lot of defences offered by people living in poor, damp council houses and therefore suffering from asthma. Will he join me in hoping that the justice system in England will hold on to Mr Aitken for as long as possible to prevent him using such spurious defences in future?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before Mr McLetchie responds, I remind members that interventions should be about the substance of the debate—a little more clearly, perhaps, than was Mr Sheridan's intervention.

David McLetchie: That was an interesting interjection by Mr Sheridan. Mr Aitken has been dealt with by the courts and no doubt he will serve his sentence. I would reflect that, had Glasgow council made better use of the receipts from the sale of council houses, and had it reinvested the money in its housing stock, many of the people that Mr Sheridan represents would not be suffering from the problems of poor housing to which his question drew attention.

If we had had consensus politics, successful major Scottish companies such as Scottish Power, British Energy and Scottish Hydro-Electric would still be languishing in the nationalised backwaters where they were some 10 years ago. There are limitations to consensus. The Opposition parties in

this chamber must be wary that consensus politics, by and large, suits the Government of the day. Real, democratic politics is about presenting choices to the voters at elections. We must avoid the situation in which, by worshipping the false god of consensus, we deny the people the opportunity now and in future elections to make real choices about their vision of Scottish society and about the sort of policies that they want pursued by the Scottish Administration.

I would also like to sound a word of caution about the implications that consensus politics have for the taxpayer. Worshipping the god of consensus inevitably leads to a tendency to duck real and difficult issues about the division of the spending cake. Instead, everyone comes together in a consensus and says that the solution is to bake a bigger cake. The ingredients of that cake would be higher spending, higher borrowing, higher taxes or higher inflation.

Mr Salmond: Can not we make a distinction between the consultative steering group report, which set out the procedures of the Parliament and which should be generally welcomed, and the practices of the coalition Administration, which should be deplored for trying to seize the Opposition's assets in order to inhibit it? Even as Opposition parties, we can surely welcome an organisation such as the CSG, which has tried in a fair-minded manner to set out the terms of debate, while obviously deploring at the same time the practices of those who try to inhibit opposition. There are surely aspects of the motion that can be generally welcomed, even by Opposition parties.

David McLetchie: That is absolutely true, but Mr Salmond was obviously not paying attention to my introductory remarks. We must be careful not to get so involved in this particular love affair with consensus that we let the Administration off the hook and allow people sanctimoniously to invoke the CSG and the phrase new politics, and all the wrapping that goes with those, to justify their own ends. I am sure that Mr Salmond will not be deceived by this any more than I will be in the years ahead in this chamber.

Mr John Swinney (Tayside North) (SNP): I am grateful to Mr McLetchie for giving way. I would like to push him on a specific point about the use of consensus in this Parliament for pursuing the objectives of the CSG report. In the last couple of days there has been a great deal of scrutiny of office costs and allowances issues. There is a need in this Parliament to extend that scrutiny and consideration to the work of special advisers and the support that they give to the ministerial team. Is not that an illustration of how the CSG principles can be extended to push the boundaries of the CSG report and to bring the Administration to account as effectively as the Opposition will be

brought to account as a result of the way in which the Administration voted yesterday?

David McLetchie: That is a very sensible suggestion that I am happy to endorse. The Conservatives believe in constructive, honest and open politics based on principle. That is a far better way to proceed. We will bring to this Parliament ideas that are based on the policies and principles that were set out in our manifesto and we will seek the support of others to turn those ideas into legislation. Similarly, if other parties bring forward proposals with which we agree, we will not hesitate to support them. We judge each idea on its merits and issue by issue. That is the honest way to conduct politics in this Parliament. It is a process of constructive engagement between parties, which we intend to apply.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am delighted to see that a large number of members have indicated that they wish to take part in this debate. For that reason it will be necessary from now on to limit contributions to three minutes.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): On a point of order. Given that statement, can the Deputy Presiding Officer confirm that the Presiding Officer's words of yesterday will be taken into account, and that anyone who gives way will be allowed time in their speech for the time taken up by interventions?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As always, we will be flexible about that, but it is up to individual members to decide whether they will take interventions.

11:28

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I should like to be more positive, if I can, after Mr McLetchie's remarks. Let us be honest about this: the CSG report is the product of a lot of hard work, and we should welcome what is in it. I want to touch on a particular issue that is dear to my heart— involvement of our young people. I refer members to page 103 of the report, which speaks of

"the establishment of a parallel 'Youth Parliament' for young people".

For some time I have been a member of the steering committee of the Highland youth parliament—one of two that were set up in Scotland as part of a European initiative. It is funded by Highland Health Board assisted by Highland Council. It has been an enormous success involving fifth-year and sixth-year pupils from our secondary schools in the Highlands. They have debated a variety of issues, particularly drugs. The feeling of those young people and of all of us on the steering committee was that the

parliament was very inclusive. We have used that word several times in the chamber today. The young people felt that they had a role and that their views were being taken on board.

I contrast that with my experience at the recent election. If it does not exist already, there is a threat of there being increasing disillusionment with the political process among young people in Scotland. To take forward the remarks made by Mr McLeish, who has now left, and by George Reid, it is important to reverse that trend. Our democracy is precious—people fought and died for it and the young must be included in it.

I welcome the comments made on page 103 of the CSG report, but we must be wary of right-on, politically correct ways of approaching such measures. I recommend that ministers consider a slightly more regionalised and more local model for a youth parliament.

I also refer ministers back to page 96 of the report, which states:

"For example, North Lanarkshire Council considered that a partnership approach between the new Parliament and the local authorities would have the advantage of allowing for local government to be used as a means of collecting public opinion."

I strongly suggest to Mr Wallace and Mr McLeish that they consider sending a message to encourage or even compel Scottish local authorities to establish a system of youth parliaments the length and breadth of Scotland. Such a system need not cost a great deal. The appropriate health boards could join in, as well as any other bodies that were identified in due course. Ministers would then hear the opinions of young people, who, let us face it, often know rather more than their fathers—my children often correct me on many things.

The local authority interface would be one way of spreading the word and bringing opinions back to the Parliament. I am deadly serious about that suggestion. I have been going on about it for some time, and I hope that members from all parties will support it.

11:32

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I want to address the draft information strategy. We talk about an open, accessible and participative democracy, but to achieve it we need a high standard of parliamentary information services. Any information strategy for this Parliament must be part of an integrated information strategy for the whole country.

Already, this small country has a plethora—indeed, some would say a surfeit—of information initiatives. As a librarian, I should be delighted that the information needs of our society are so high on

the agenda. Instead, I am horrified at the haphazard, unco-ordinated manner in which vast sums of public money are being spent. A rough estimate of the moneys already committed runs to hundreds of millions of pounds. One librarian recently remarked to me, "Scotland could be wired to the moon and back for these sums."

The worst aspect of many such projects is that they are often mutually exclusive and many elements of service are duplicated.

Earlier this year, the Scottish Library Information Council produced a report entitled, "Enabling seamless access: The case for a national information strategy for Scotland". It may sound boring, but I urge all members to read it and the Scottish Parliament information centre's research note 99/8 entitled, "The Parliament's information strategy". The SLIC report says that, without co-ordination, the continued growth of separate networks may in the long term prevent the development of the "seamless access" to information and knowledge that is clearly in the interests of Scotland's citizens.

The draft information strategy and annexe J of the CSG report, which deals with information and communication technologies and democratic participation, give more examples of the need for co-ordination of a national information strategy.

A total of 73 partner libraries in constituencies throughout the country are now linked with the Parliament library; all 73 are public libraries. The public libraries network, which would allow constituents access to parliamentary information at the branch library closest to them, does not yet exist, and it looks increasingly unlikely that the target date of 2002 for its launch will be met.

Even if such a network were in place, it must be remembered that the internet is not always the best solution to people's information needs. Skills are needed to use the technology and money is needed to pay the charges that most libraries are forced to levy. If the Government is able to deliver on its promise of an e-mail address for every pupil, schoolchildren will have free local access to the Scottish Parliament, yet their parents will not. That begs the question: why is there one network for schools and another for libraries?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you wind up, please?

Fiona McLeod: With its new Parliament, Scotland is ideally placed to become a world leader in the knowledge century that we are about to enter, but that will happen only if we heed the professionals and adopt a coherent, integrated approach to information management.

I commend the work of Janet Seaton, Bill Bell and all the partner libraries. They worked to tight

time scales and with often scant or non-existent budgets to ensure that a fledging information service was available for the start of this Parliament.

11:36

Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): I support the motion. Rarely can a Parliament have been in the enviable position of starting from scratch and being able to adopt the best practice available. We can ensure that the most modern working methods are used to deliver efficient government and that some of the key words in the CSG report—accessible, open, responsive and participative—can be fleshed out and do not remain wishful thinking.

Individuals and many organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors have a strong desire for a different relationship with Government. Many of the structures proposed in the CSG report will go a long way towards building that.

As someone who has worked to implement information technology for many years, I am excited by the opportunities contained in the report by the expert panel on information and communications technologies. I hope that all members have looked at the excellent Scottish Parliament website; all the information on who members are and what they think is available to anyone who wishes to look it up, and every word spoken in the chamber is available on the internet the following day. I agree with Fiona McLeod that there must be other ways of communicating with people, but I would point out that some 29 per cent of the adult population have access to the internet and a further 14 per cent will sign up this year. Through initiatives such as the national grid for learning and a free e-mail address for every child, the internet will be increasingly important in disseminating information.

The opportunities that IT offers to overcome geographic remoteness are of interest to me. While my constituency is not especially remote, large parts of Scotland are. One of the CSG proposals is the development of community media centres and the use of video-conferencing technology, which will help to implement dialogue and participation between the Parliament and its committees and Scottish society, a key idea in the CSG report. For many groups, travelling to give evidence to committees will always be difficult and expensive, and that could be simply because of cost, age or disability. Committee meetings outside Edinburgh will always be only a partial solution to the problem, because there will always be someone at the other end of the country or someone for whom travelling on that particular day will be impossible because of winter weather.

Making available desktop video-conferencing in every school for the use of the community is a way of turning into reality democratic participation by the community in this Parliament and its work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you wind up, please?

Elaine Thomson: Technology is developing at a great speed; our use of it must be forward looking and strategic. The move to the new Parliament building in a few years will allow us to examine how well things are working now and to plan even more effectively for the future. The groundwork that was done by members of the CSG and the expert ICT panel has provided us with an excellent framework. I congratulate all those involved.

11:40

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): It would be churlish to say other than that the group did a sound and thorough job in preparing its fairly lengthy report. Most of it, of course, is common sense, and common sense is the way in which we would wish to run things. However, David McLetchie was correct to point out that the language used in the report is indicative of the fact that we are getting far too hung up on what is euphemistically termed the new politics and political correctness.

What is meant by new politics? Of course, we do not wish unnecessary confrontation, or to have members of this chamber abusing one another, but all of us were elected as members of political parties and all of us have differing and sincerely and deeply held political beliefs. If we cannot argue those beliefs forcefully and determinedly, we are not being loyal to those beliefs. We can argue without any animosity at the end of the day. We should bear that in mind. We would do well to remember that there is nothing wrong with introducing a bit of passion into politics.

I am intrigued by some other aspects of the report. It states that we should use

"simple, clear, inclusive and non-gender specific"

language—whatever that means. I have some difficulty in reconciling that aim with page 64 of the report, where the word unicameral is used. Reference to "The Chambers Dictionary" leads me to believe that that word means one chamber.

I have some difficulty with other aspects of the report. Henry McLeish said that the key principles of the report ensured that the Executive would be more accountable, but I have difficulty in equating that with the somewhat restrictive approach that has been taken towards parliamentary questions. I also have difficulty with the fact that when a minister is the subject of a motion of no confidence imposed by Parliament, there is no necessity for

that individual to resign.

I found the public participation aspect of the report to be of tremendous interest. Clearly, as Henry McLeish said, this chamber does not have a monopoly on wisdom. Out there, there is a great deal of untapped knowledge and expertise that Parliament would do well to seek and utilise. However, there are dangers in doing that, and when we come to consider our public participation approach, it will be necessary to do so in such a manner as to separate the wheat from the chaff. We must ensure that public participation is consistently positive and that we do not leave ourselves open to cranks and one-issue activists, who would not, to my mind, be the appropriate people to consult.

Other aspects of the report are worthy of more detailed study, but basically it provides us with a sound framework. I hope that as matters evolve we will use the report as a basis, but perhaps no more than a basis, for the form that this Parliament will take.

11:43

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):

I will address the equal opportunities recommendations of the CSG report. The area of equal opportunities will be of key importance to the work of this Parliament. It is unfortunate that equal opportunities legislation remains a reserved matter, because that will be a frustrating barrier to the work of this Parliament. However, that should not reduce the importance of making sure that legislation emanating from this Parliament does not discriminate against any section of Scotland's society.

The Equal Opportunities Committee will have a key role in ensuring that that does not happen, but we must do much more. Alex Salmond said yesterday that we have a Scottish Parliament without any elected representatives from Scotland's ethnic minority communities or people with disabilities. We must take early action to remedy that imbalance. We can go some way towards achieving that, by making sure that the Parliament's committees invite representatives from under-represented sections of society. People can advise committees, but we do not want such consultation to be token. Rather, we want it to provide real input in the early stages of policy making in this Parliament.

This is about not just MSPs, but the Scottish Parliament as an employer. I should be interested to know, for example, how many of the staff who are employed in the Scottish Parliament are from an ethnic minority background or have a disability. It would be appropriate for the Equal Opportunities Committee to conduct an early audit, so that that

could be looked at.

Another early task of the Equal Opportunities Committee will be to produce a policy statement and plan. I implore that committee to avoid the jargon that many see as the domain of the chattering classes and instead to come up with an equal opportunities policy statement and plan that has relevance to the lives of all Scotland's people.

I will finish with a comment from the CSG report on the style of decision making:

"The traditional Westminster style of point-scoring, quick repartee, aggression and counter-aggression is alienating for most women, people with a different cultural background, many disabled people and indeed, many men. To promote inclusiveness it will be important to set a style that listens to views, seeks to find solutions to problems and allows for the development of constructive argument and debate."

Like many other people, I am sure, I feel that that has been sadly lacking in the debates so far. I hope that we will all take on board the spirit and recommendations of the CSG report.

11:46

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Madam Deputy Presiding Officer, I owe Malcolm Chisholm an apology from yesterday, for referring to him as Malcolm Bruce. I notice that that has been corrected in the *Official Report*; it comes from the Liberal Democrats joining up with the Labour party.

I would like to draw members' attention to page 11, paragraph 41 of the CSG report, on committees. It reads:

"In summary it is clear that there is no single model for consultation, participation and involvement which is appropriate in every case. The Parliament should be invited to encourage its Committees to adopt different mechanisms appropriate to the issue under consideration."

That is one of the most important paragraphs in this excellent document. It says that the committees should be encouraged to develop their own participative mechanisms. However, I should like to take that further and develop it.

As I mentioned yesterday, a few of us attended the last meeting of People and Parliament, chaired by Canon Kenyon Wright, who is with us today. People and Parliament will produce one further report, which can be presented to us for consideration. I suggest that the Executive require every committee of this Parliament, before it starts its business, to address itself, as a matter of priority, to the reports of People and Parliament, and to work out how it will relate to the public. Committees should also draw up their own priorities, especially for dealing with groups that are not represented in this Parliament. They should set targets for their participative

engagements and report back on how they have achieved them—or on the progress that they have made towards achieving them—by the end of the year.

Although I know that this is not the moment to move formally that the Executive proceed along those lines, I implore it to make a recommendation of the sort that I have outlined to all the committees of the Parliament.

11:49

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): It is with considerable pride that I speak today for the first time as the member of the Scottish Parliament for Clydesdale. However, that does not compare with the pride that I felt when I was elected as the first ever woman member of this Scottish Parliament early on the morning of 7 May.

I was proud, obviously, for myself and my family and friends, but I was prouder for the people of Clydesdale, who have in the past sent women to Parliament—women of the calibre of Judith Hart. In sending me here, they sent a clear indication of the new Scotland that this Parliament represents. In sending a working-class woman, born and brought up in rural Scotland—in Jedburgh—whose mother was a single parent, struggling every day to live on poverty wages, the people of Clydesdale said that this is truly a Parliament for everyone in Scotland.

Let us be honest: not many people in Clydesdale have heard of the consultative steering group, or of the excellent recommendations in its report. If we implement those recommendations well, they will have an impact on the everyday lives of everyone in Clydesdale and Scotland.

I have spent my working life in Lanarkshire dealing with young people who every day experience social exclusion—before we even invented the phrase. The CSG report will begin to reconnect those young people. They think that politics and the political process do not matter. The report is about making politics real, which is why I want to see all pupils visit this Parliament at least once in their school life to see us at work, to see how laws are made and to see how business is done. Westminster could never have achieved that. I therefore support the establishment of a youth parliament, to give our young people a real say in how Scotland is run as we enter the new millennium. I welcome the report's commitment to family-friendly working practices, which will enable women—and men—to be active politicians, while spending quality time with their families.

That is why we must constantly consult civic Scotland, community organisations, voluntary organisations, the Churches, employers and trade unions, all of which have a stake in our society

and in this Parliament. I welcome Henry McLeish's commitment to establish the civic forum and to continue consultation. That is what we are about: a Parliament for all of Scotland.

The CSG report is not just about words. It is about action: action for the woman stuck at home because she cannot afford child care; action for the young man who is bullied at school because of his sexuality; action for the pensioner who is scared to leave home at night because of the crime on our streets; action for the man who is unemployed simply because of the colour of his skin.

The report sends a message about a Parliament for all of Scotland, which will listen to all of Scotland, represent all of Scotland and act for all of Scotland. I commend the report to members.

11:52

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Karen Gillon's comments were a timely reminder of what this debate is about: we are dealing with the procedures of the Parliament, which are a means to an end. However, the tone of the debate has been very good. Mr McLeish and Mr Reid made distinguished speeches earlier, and we would all agree with them.

A considerable onus lies on the Executive. Page 8 of the CSG report states that it

"is essential that the culture of openness and accessibility is reflected in the working of the Scottish Executive."

That is about balance between the Parliament, the Executive and the people of Scotland. I ask Jim Wallace, when he winds up, to comment on the civil servants' relationship with the Parliament. Donald Gorrie has made a point on that matter—it is a fundamental one. I know that civil servants remain Crown employees, but I have never for the life of me been able to understand why this Parliament should have so much difficulty with the concept of direct access to civil servants.

When I served on Glasgow District Council, there was no problem: we went to see the chief executive or head of department, obtained information and got on with our work. The approach was open. There did not seem to be any great difficulty in managing that, nor with the idea of responsibility to the council's executive.

I also ask Mr Wallace to deal with how the Executive will approach the mechanisms for dealing with human rights: for legislation and for its own activities. It is important that the proper tone is set.

It is also important to strike a balance with the voluntary sector. Our society is pluralist; it is the Parliament's duty to reflect that in its operations. The voluntary sector is in many ways the key

feature of society. Often, voluntary sector organisations have been grant-funded on the basis that they should in some way fit into the corporate objectives of either central or local government, but the voluntary sector and its different sections have their own criteria and their own priorities, which, in a pluralist society, are just as valid and should be recognised. It would be wrong to impose a structure that in any way dampened down the rights of the voluntary sector.

My final point is on the power of the committees. They will be extremely important, and the committee chairs, the rapporteurs and the vice-chairs, if we have them, must take an approach that is separate and independent from that of the Executive. The members who hold those positions will be the representatives par excellence of the Parliament, and it is important that they reflect that in the way in which they operate.

The CSG report, as Robin Harper said, is excellent and a good basis for proceeding. Let us try to have the robust exchange of views that Bill Aitken and David McLetchie talked about—that is a valid point—but without recourse to words such as dishonesty and sanctimoniousness, and other personalised words. If we approach each other in a spirit of courtesy, it may well be more possible to take on the points made by Opposition parties and Opposition members.

11:57

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I, too, welcome the report. I was pleased to play a small part in it in my former job with BT Scotland, by co-ordinating the company's response to the consultation exercise. BT saw it as an important opportunity to contribute to the new Scotland. In appendix A to annexe D of the report, many other companies, professional bodies, trade associations, voluntary sector and local government organisations and individual citizens are listed, who also contributed their views on how the Parliament should operate. There is an unprecedented reservoir of good will, good ideas and determination to create a modern and distinct Parliament and to enhance the democratic process in Scotland. Given the poor turnout in our elections to the Parliament, which is likely to be trumped tomorrow in the European elections, we certainly need that increased participation and involvement.

Unfortunately, I cannot share all of Mr McLeish's interpretation of the events of the past few weeks. Unless we make a positive and determined effort to follow through some of the CSG recommendations, many of the aspirations for a new and better form of government in Scotland will not be realised in this term of the Parliament. We have seen already a coterie of publicly financed

special advisers; we have seen important announcements made to the media before members were informed; and we have seen a style of debate in which Opposition members were told that their role was to be quiet and listen.

Yesterday's proceedings would be described by any objective person as immature and by anyone looking for a new Scotland as deeply depressing. The outcome was an office allowances scheme that would not stand up to any logical scrutiny. If we continue in that fashion, rather than encouraging greater participation, we will put people off. That would be a great pity, given the reservoir of good will, good ideas and good intentions that has been created.

Ultimately, it is up to each of us as individual parliamentarians to ensure that the work of the CSG is followed through to action in the Parliament. That places a particular responsibility on non-Executive members of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats. During the coming weeks and months, they must have a greater courage of their convictions in debates. Abstaining and putting forward ill-conceived compromise motions will not create a new and better form of government in Scotland. If all members play a full role in the activities of this Parliament, and express their own views, we can and will carry out the recommendations of the CSG report as the people of Scotland want us to.

12:00

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I shall speak on the section of the CSG report that deals with the sharing of power and the role of civic society. Paragraph 19 says:

"The development and implementation of legislation needs to take account of the diversity which exists across Scotland. Specifically, we recognise that well intentioned legislation cannot always be implemented in an Islands context without practical difficulties arising."

There is still concern in areas such as Shetland that the Parliament will concentrate on the needs of the central belt, not on those of peripheral, rural and island areas. It is up to the Parliament to demonstrate that that is not the case and that there are ways in which peripheral, rural and island areas can be at the heart of what goes on in here—most importantly, in the committees. We have it in our hands to choose between a Parliament that is only for the central belt and one that is for all of Scotland's diverse regions. That is the broad context in which I enthusiastically welcome the CSG report.

Right from the early days of the Scottish constitutional convention, representatives of the island areas—Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles—have argued constructively for the special needs of those areas to be recognised. I pay

tribute to those who worked on such bodies as the islands working group of the SCC. Their ideas are coming to fruition in the CSG report and the standing orders.

Islands representatives have pointed out—right across the spectrum of policy issues—that they live in a different environment: a fresh wind in Edinburgh is but a gentle breeze at home in Lerwick. They have also drawn attention to the problems that we face day in, day out. A short journey to an out-patient clinic in a Glasgow hospital contrasts with the experience of someone who lives on Unst, who must take a ferry, a car, a ferry, a car, a plane and a taxi to get to the middle of Aberdeen, and must spend two nights away from home.

There are differences in perspective and of practical considerations. Any member here could listen to a representative of the Hjaltsland Housing Association for a spare hour or two, who would illustrate the problems of trying to make warm and draught-free houses that are built to a standard Scottish Homes will fund. There are big differences between the Scottish regions in such practical matters. That is one of the great strengths and delights of Scotland. The islands are different and they deserve to be given special consideration.

Page 6 of the CSG report says:

"We recommend that committees engaged in pre-legislative scrutiny should specifically address the issue of implementation in Island areas and where appropriate make recommendations for suitable amendments or derogations."

That is a particularly important sentence. We should ensure that legislation that would not work in the Western Isles, or which would damage a business in Orkney, is not introduced. Such problems were recognised by the Scottish constitutional convention, and here we have the mechanisms to provide practical safeguards for island areas.

In our representation of issues in the islands, we do not seek to clog up the business of the Parliament; we seek to ensure that the interests of those areas will be looked into by the Parliament as a matter of routine. The simplest way forward would be to put in place a requirement for each item of legislation to be accompanied by a memorandum that examines its implications for island areas and proposes exemptions or special provisions for the islands, if necessary. That is what I ask the minister to consider in his concluding remarks.

12:04

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I welcome the CSG report. I have come from the voluntary

sector and I am excited by this morning's debate because it is about finding a new way of doing things. All of us who campaigned for election to the Scottish Parliament continually told people that it would be a different kind of Parliament that would introduce a new politics. Much reference has been made to new politics; perhaps we all need to learn how that new politics will operate. It should be about listening and I hope that we can get away from attacking people all the time.

The people in our communities, who are listening to what is happening in Parliament, want to be listened to. They want a voice, but they need to know that someone will listen to that voice. If we ask young people—the people whom Karen Gillon mentioned—about politics, they will say, "No one is interested, no one is listening and it's not about me." We have a responsibility to change that attitude. We must do something about people who feel excluded from the decision-making process and who feel that no one cares how their lives progress.

The idea of a civic forum is very exciting. It will give us an opportunity to consider how we can take things forward. The forum could assist the Parliament with consultations, it could explore new ways of doing things and it could bring together a wide range of bodies to examine how power and decision making in the Parliament can be influenced. The forum could conduct a dialogue across the civic sector in Scotland and link with other forums.

It is vital that the forum should exist. It would not be a threat to this Parliament; it would be a gateway that would facilitate the Parliament's work. We should examine how the forum will be resourced, how it will be established, and how we can support it. If we are serious about this Parliament being a people's Parliament, we must have links across Scotland. The Parliament should be more than a meeting that takes place in Edinburgh.

12:06

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I want to address the issue of equal opportunities, which has been raised by several members. In particular, I want to mention annex H in the CSG report, entitled "Mainstreaming Equality in the Scottish Parliament".

During the past week, I have had the opportunity to visit all the main buildings in the parliamentary complex and to assess them for access for disabled people. Although some good work has been undertaken, much work has still to be carried out. I ask the Minister for Justice, in winding up, to give me an assurance that the further adaptations that are required to the Parliament's buildings will

be undertaken as soon as possible.

I shall give some examples. Cannonball House does not have any form of disabled access. The microphone consoles that we use have no indication for someone with a visual impairment. The swipe card points in the building are too high for someone in a wheelchair. Those are basic issues that could readily be addressed, and I ask that they be carried out, given that we will be here for at least the next two years.

Should this Parliament decide to move elsewhere, the new Parliament should be barrier free. Unfortunately, disability is a social construct; it is society that puts barriers in the way of people with disabilities. Before we start talking about equal opportunities and telling other people what to do, we should sort out our own back yard.

12:08

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): This has been a very useful debate. Those of us who were involved in the consultative steering group were only too pleased that the debate should take place early in the Parliament so that we could hear the views of members. All the CSG could do was make recommendations. Over time, it will fall to the Parliament to flesh out and change those recommendations where necessary.

Although the CSG arrived at a report that was based on consensus, it is fair to say that, in reaching that consensus, there was some pretty robust discussion. That gives the lie to the idea that all consensual agreements are somewhat soggy and are arrived at in some watery way. It is possible for robust discussion to lead to consensus.

Shona Robison drew attention to the passage in the report that said that we should not indulge in Westminster-style point scoring. Therefore, if I say no more about David McLetchie's speech, I am sure that members will understand.

Some very important remarks have been made and it is vital that this Parliament should, at the earliest opportunity, affirm the key principles of the report. Mr McLeish reminded us of them: power should be shared between the Parliament, the Executive and the people of Scotland; the Executive should be accountable to the Parliament, and the Parliament to the people; the Parliament should be open, accessible and participative; and its operations should embrace equal opportunities for all. A number of comments reflecting on those key principles have been made during the debate.

Michael Matheson referred to the importance of disability access. I think that I am right, Sir David,

in passing that buck to you and to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, which has that responsibility. I am sure, however, that everyone will have heard those important comments on access and facilities for people with disabilities.

Substance is already being given to the consultative steering group's recommendations on equal opportunities by the fact that we will have an Equal Opportunities Committee. It will be up to that committee to organise itself, but it could, if it wanted to, appoint a number of special advisers from ethnic communities or other groups where there was felt to be a need for equal opportunities. The committee could also establish a panel of experts to assist it. There are imaginative and innovative ways in which the bones of the CSG principles can be given more substance, particularly as the committees get down to work.

Many of the CSG recommendations are already in operation. We have electronic voting, which we now take for granted, although those of us brought up in the Westminster tradition find it a revolution and far simpler and speedier than what happens in Westminster.

Tavish Scott mentioned island communities. Rule 9.3.3 of the standing orders says that the policy memorandum that the Executive will be obliged to supply along with a bill must assess the effects of the bill on, among other things, equal opportunities and island communities. It will then be for the committee to assess that policy memorandum. It will also have to address how a particular piece of legislation will impact on an island community.

I point out to Robert Brown that the policy memorandum must also include the human rights aspect of any piece of legislation. I remind members that, from 1 July when we obtain our full powers, the legislation says that the European convention on human rights must underpin everything we do—all policies and all the legislation passed by this Parliament must comply with the convention. It is almost a foundation stone of our new constitutional settlement that human rights will be part and parcel of what we do.

Mr Salmond: Will the Deputy First Minister confirm that the European convention on human rights also applies to legislation passed in the Westminster Parliament which, as we heard earlier, also impacts on devolved legislation? I am thinking of the Immigration and Asylum Bill, for example.

Mr Wallace: The impact of the European convention on human rights and the Human Rights Act 1998 on Westminster legislation is different from the impact of the convention on legislation passed by this Parliament. Any legislation passed by this Parliament that did not

comply with the European convention on human rights would be shot down as ultra vires, whereas it would not be possible for the courts to strike down Westminster legislation. Mr Salmond knows, however, that there is a fast-track procedure in the human rights legislation that allows Westminster to correct any provision of its legislation that does not comply with our obligations under the convention.

Several members have made it clear that participation is key to the way in which this Parliament operates. A monopoly of wisdom is not vested in the 129 of us who were successful in our election to Parliament. Participation must include youth, and I point out to Jamie Stone that the youth parliament will hold a meeting at Murrayfield on 30 June, at which I am sure members will be welcome.

My colleague, Mr McLeish, wrote to all local authorities earlier this year expressing support for the youth parliament and inviting them to consider ways in which they could interact with the voice of young people at a local level. Mr Stone and, I think, Karen Gillon talked about the importance of involving our young people. There will be opportunities at a national level to do that and local authorities will be encouraged to follow good practice and get young people involved at a local level. Information is the currency of any informed debate.

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): If Mr Wallace agrees with the importance of the civic forum in advancing democratic input, what practical assistance does he intend to give it, and over what time scale? Can he comment on MSPs' access to civil servants?

Mr Wallace: If Mr Welsh will bear with me on that last point, I was coming to the important point about the civic forum raised by Mr Reid and others.

Information technology is an important part of how the Parliament will operate. We are fortunate that there is expertise in our own ranks; Fiona McLeod has expertise in librarianship and Elaine Thomson and David Mundell have expertise in information technology. I hope that the nature of the Parliament is that we will use the expertise outside it and within it to ensure that we impart information effectively.

Remote areas were mentioned. From Orkney, Edinburgh is remote. If we want a two-way process, people in all parts of Scotland ought to know what we are doing here. However, it is equally important that we—who are working here in meetings of the Parliament, in the Executive, and in committees—must have a way in which to find out what people in all parts of Scotland are thinking. I do not think that we can understate the importance of IT and other refined means of

communication for maximising that two-way flow of information.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The Minister mentioned the outlying areas. The CSG report refers to the family-friendly hours of the Parliament; I welcome the Wednesday and Thursday meetings, but I note that on Wednesdays we finish at 5.30 pm. Why can the Parliament not go on into the evening? Why can we not make full use of working time on that day? Only nine constituencies fall within the category 1 formula used in yesterday's debate. An extended debate on Wednesday evenings would be of great use to members from outlying areas.

Mr Wallace: Mr Gallie will recognise that the CSG gave much consideration to this matter. There was a consensus on working hours, both across the parties and among those who belonged to no party. I cannot get home at 5.30 pm on a Wednesday. Even if we rose at 4.30 pm I could not get home that night and be back here the following morning. For many people there will be the opportunity to get back home, and it is important that that opportunity is taken. There is provision for meeting late if the need arises.

It has already been pointed out that a commitment to the civic forum appears not only in the CSG report, but in the partnership agreement. Mr Reid raised an interesting point about the Parliament, not simply the Executive, being involved. I would be happy for Executive officials to explore with the parliamentary authorities how the Parliament might interact with the civic forum and, through the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, whether the relationship is workable or appropriate.

With regard to funding, we hope that we can channel encouragement into concrete assistance and support for the civic forum. I cannot commit the Executive to a particular level or pattern of funding at this stage because, as Mr Reid knows, there is some difficulty with regard to statutory authority, or lack of it. However, I am sure that over the months ahead we will want to discuss how we can give substance to the idea of the civic forum, which is widely supported across the parties. Much support for it has been expressed in the debate today.

We all recognise that the relationship between the civil service and the Executive is different from the one that exists between council officials and the council itself. Civil servants are employed by the Crown, whereas council officials are employed by the council.

In yesterday's debate on committees, it was said that it is expected that civil servants will be able to give assistance to committees, particularly through the provision of factual information when it is

required. The very fact that the Parliament and the civil servants are in Edinburgh will change the atmosphere and environment, compared with the inevitable remoteness that existed when the civil service was based in Edinburgh while our parliamentarians were in London.

We are all responsible for ensuring that the Scottish Parliament's operation—in terms of the legislation that it makes and its effectiveness in scrutinising the work of the Executive—becomes an example of good practice that might be followed elsewhere.

The great expectations of the Scottish people rest on our shoulders. By embracing the four key CSG principles and putting them into practice in the weeks and months ahead, we can achieve a Parliament for the whole of Scotland, of which, regardless of party, the people of Scotland can be proud.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): That concludes the debate on the CSG report; we will vote on the motion during decision time at the end of this morning's meeting.

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The standing orders allow for 10 minutes' debate on the business motion, with one speaker for and one against. Members should indicate if they wish to speak against the business motion.

12:21

The Business Manager (Mr Tom McCabe): Before I move the motion, perhaps it will help if I explain that in the light of developments relating to the Holyrood project, I intend to propose to the Parliamentary Bureau that time be set aside in next week's business for a debate, on an Executive motion, on the Holyrood project.

If that is acceptable, I propose to amend next week's business as follows. On Wednesday 16 June at 9.30 am, I will move a revised business motion after discussion with the bureau. That will be followed by a statement by the First Minister on the Executive's legislative proposals. That debate will continue all day on Wednesday and will conclude at 5 pm. That will make space on Thursday 17 June for a debate on the Holyrood project, which will commence at 10.30 am and conclude at 12.20 pm.

On the afternoon of 17 June, the business will be as proposed in the motion before Parliament today: oral questions will begin at 2.30 pm and will be followed by a debate on the motion on tuition fees, in the name of the Deputy First Minister. At the conclusion of that business, we will be asked to agree a motion on committee membership and convenerships.

The business to be taken in the second week, on Wednesday 23 and Thursday 24 June, is provisional. However, I confirm that it is intended that the Deputy First Minister will make a statement on a subject to be announced on Wednesday 23 June and that a debate on financial issues will take place during the afternoon of Thursday 24 June. In addition, members will wish to note that provision has been made for the first non-Executive business to be held on the morning of Thursday 24 June on a motion from the Scottish nationalist party. [MEMBERS: "We are the Scottish National party."] I apologise. If members submit a range of suggestions for that motion, I will try to ensure that the one that is suitable to most members is selected.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Just the correct name would do.

Mr McCabe: A further question time will then be held on the afternoon of Thursday 24 June.

The Presiding Officer: The motion is before the

chamber. Nobody has asked to speak against it.

It might be helpful to members if I make a statement from the chair to add to what Mr McCabe said about the Holyrood project. I remind everyone that responsibility for the Holyrood project passed on 1 June from the Executive to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

The corporate body, which has five members who were elected by MSPs, has held its first meeting. The corporate body is answerable to members for the project and is responsible for it in law. Members of the corporate body are, in effect, the clients of the project. For that reason, we will discuss the implications of the project with the architect and the project team this afternoon. We have instructed that no further works contracts should be signed in the next 10 days, which is the maximum period for which we can make such an arrangement without penalty. That gives us time to discuss the whole matter further.

I am arranging for the full paper that the corporate body has already discussed to be available to all members this afternoon. I also hope to arrange a series of informal seminars—at least two, and possibly three—to allow members to ask the project team questions. The seminars will take place next week, before we debate the matter. They will be chaired by the Deputy Presiding Officers. Details will be announced in the business bulletin.

We in the corporate body are conscious of the fact that, although we are responsible for the project, we are answerable to the whole of this Parliament and that the Parliament must give us instructions.

I am grateful to the Business Manager for proposing a rearrangement of next week's business to allow the Parliament to take a fundamental decision on the Holyrood project in time, without incurring any penalties on the contract.

I hope that what I have said clarifies the position and that it has been helpful to all members.

The question is, that motion S1M-44, in the name of Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following business programme:

Wednesday 16 June 1999

2.30 pm	Statement by the First Minister and debate on the Executive's legislative proposals
5.00 pm	Decision Time

followed by
Members' Business
Debate on the subject of motion
S1M-42 in the name of David
Mundell

Monday 21 to Friday 25 June and Monday 28 June to
Friday 2 July and (2) the summer recess should begin on
Friday 2 July 1999 after the business of that day has been
concluded and should end on Monday 30 August 1999,
with the next meeting of the Parliament being held on or
after Tuesday 31 August 1999.—[*Mr McCabe.*]

Thursday 17 June 1999

9.30 am Continuation of debate on the
proposed legislative programme

followed by
Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by
No later than 3.15 pm

Debate on S1M-2 (Mr Jim Wallace)
on Tuition Fees

followed by
Motion proposing establishment of
committees (to be taken without
debate)

5.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 23 June 1999

2.30 pm Statement by the Deputy First
Minister

followed by
No later than 3.00 pm

Executive Business

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by
Members' Business

Thursday 24 June 1999

9.30 am Non-executive Business (on a
motion from the SNP)

followed by
Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by
No later than 3.15 pm

Debate on Financial Issues

5.00 pm Decision Time

The Presiding Officer: I now ask Mr McCabe to
move motion S1M-34 formally.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that - (1) the Office of the
Clerk should be open on each of the following days:

Decision Time

12:27

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The question is, that motion S1M-39, in the name of Henry McLeish, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament records its appreciation of the work of the Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament; acknowledges the contribution which the Group's Reports have made to the development of the procedures of the Parliament; and agrees that its operations should embody the spirit of the CSG key principles.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S1M-34, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that - (1) the Office of the Clerk should be open on each of the following days: Monday 21 to Friday 25 June and Monday 28 June to Friday 2 July and (2) the summer recess should begin on Friday 2 July 1999 after the business of that day has been concluded and should end on Monday 30 August 1999, with the next meeting of the Parliament being held on or after Tuesday 31 August 1999.

Meeting closed at 12:28.

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