

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 23 September 1999

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 23 September 1999

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

Crime Prevention

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The first item of business is a debate on motion S1M-163, in the name of Angus MacKay, on crime prevention. There is also an amendment to that motion.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Do you not agree that the lack of members in the chamber is criminal?

The Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order.

09:31

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay): At least allegations of criminality are marginally relevant to the debate.

I am pleased that we have the opportunity today to debate a topic that is one of the top priorities of the Scottish Executive. Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and increasing community safety are matters that will prove to be as important for the new Parliament as they were for successive Administrations in Scotland, in particular for the Scottish Office under the Labour Government from 1997.

Members of the Scottish Parliament are fortunate to be able to look back on a substantial legacy of achievement on which to build a safer Scotland. The debate provides us with an ideal opportunity not only to reflect on what has been achieved, but to look ahead at what we aim to do to make our communities safer.

The Scottish Executive has inherited an approach from Labour in the Scottish Office that is every bit as relevant to the aims of the Parliament. No apologies need be made for picking up that standard. The phrase "tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime" is a real commitment not only to deal effectively and swiftly with offenders, but to tackle the root causes that lead to criminality in the first place. We take the twofold nature of that commitment very seriously. Being tough on crime is only half the battle.

Crime has been dropping steadily for a number of years. However, last year, for the first time since 1991, there was an upturn of 3 per cent in recorded crime figures. Although that increase can be attributed mainly to a rise in crimes of

dishonesty, such as housebreaking and theft, there is no doubt about the long-term trends in issues such as violence, sex crimes and drugs. The Executive is taking a more focused and rigorous approach to those key areas. We have moved swiftly to implement the new measures in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, creating orders on anti-social behaviour, sex offenders, drug treatment and testing and a new offence of racial harassment.

Recent indications from the police suggest that higher crime figures have been recorded for the first half of 1999. That is a clear warning to us all against complacency. We are providing the police with the resources to tackle the crimes that cause the public the most distress. We also must maintain our investment in anti-crime measures.

On a more positive note, police clear-up rates continued to improve last year—that has been the trend throughout the 1990s. Our substantial investment in the installation of closed-circuit television systems throughout Scotland has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to those figures.

It is worth reflecting on the programme that has been in place for some time. That programme has three main themes. First, we intend to tackle the underlying causes of crime—social, educational, and economic. Secondly, we aim to prevent offending, not only through crime prevention as it is traditionally understood, but by enabling early intervention in situations that may lead to offending. Finally, we want to deal with offenders in ways that reduce the risk of reoffending. It is important that we develop practical and sustainable policies rather than attempt half-hearted, quick-fix solutions.

There is no doubt that deep-rooted divisions still exist within Scotland. The debilitating fear and distress caused by crime eats away at our ideals of community and society. We are, however, committed to a just society, in which every individual is valued. That same individual must hold personal responsibility to society and must be held responsible for their actions.

Crime is not an abstract notion; it cannot be considered in isolation from its causes, many of which are rooted in underlying social problems. Deprivation and disadvantage are daily facts of life for too many people in Scotland. Crime and poverty are inextricably linked. It is estimated that, in Scotland, two out of every five babies are born into poverty. At this point it is worth pausing to congratulate my colleague the Minister for Health and Community Care on her recent announcement that, working alongside the UK Government, the Scottish Executive is committed to lifting 60,000 children out of poverty by the year 2002.

Educational achievement, on average, is much lower among low-income families. Substantial evidence shows that poor education and poor health are contributory factors to delinquency. Those are key areas on which the Scottish Executive is focusing. We already have a range of policies and initiatives in place—such as the new deal, new community schools and social inclusion partnerships—to combat the social deprivation and isolating social exclusion that so often leads to crime.

In respect of community safety, the Scottish Executive has a duty to provide the means for people in Scotland to feel safe. The coalition takes that duty very seriously. We are determined to fulfil the commitment to ensure that Scottish people feel safe and secure in their homes, as well as in the surrounding locality and communities in which they work.

I would like to outline what we have done so far to improve and advance community safety. We have an excellent relationship with local government, whose support is fundamental to delivering the Scottish Executive's priorities in a number of areas that affect our local communities.

We have a joint strategy for action—the safer communities through partnerships programme, which was launched in June 1998 in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Chief Police Officers. The strategy encourages local authorities and the police to lead local partnerships—involving public, private and voluntary bodies—to tackle the community issues that are of the greatest concern to local people. That concept has been adopted by most local authorities in Scotland. As the motion recognises, only through the forging of such strong partnerships will we see the fulfilment of our broader agenda to reduce crime, to reduce the fear of crime and, not least, to improve the quality of life in communities throughout Scotland.

We are determined that those partnerships will work and we are helping them in a number of ways. In February, the Scottish Office published "A Safer Scotland: Tackling Crime and its Causes", which describes the Government's strategy for tackling crime and its causes and identifies the way forward for building public confidence and safer communities.

The justice system must be fair to all those who are involved in its process. The public must have confidence that the system convicts the guilty and acquits the innocent. People need to be confident that, if they are witnesses or victims, the system will deal with them with consideration. Using best practice gained from established partnerships, we recently published guidance entitled "Safer Communities in Scotland", which provides a framework that partnerships are encouraged to

apply to all aspects of community safety.

A number of recent reports have identified a need for joint training between police officers and local authority policy officers, not only to gain an understanding of organisational and cultural differences, but to develop practical processes for the development of joint policies and strategies. Bearing that in mind, we are in the early stages of creating a joint training programme in conjunction with the Scottish Police College at Tulliallan to satisfy that need.

As part of the on-going process of developing and implementing our community safety policies, I am hosting a conference on 2 November to drive home the need for partnerships to be results focused. I also want to reinforce the Government's desire for tangible improvements in community safety.

The Scottish Executive is determined to develop and forge new approaches. We must support our communities by responding to their local concerns and ensure that public services can respond through the integration and effective co-ordination of community safety strategies and action plans for proper crime prevention.

The concept of working partnerships between local people, agencies and organisations is crucial to the success of the new communities that care initiative. Partnerships under the umbrella of that initiative are being established in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee with funding from the Scottish Executive crime prevention unit. The social exclusion programme is funding a fourth project in South Lanarkshire. Those locally managed and locally accountable programmes focus on improved community safety; they are grounded in careful risk assessment and management. Their aim is to achieve sustainable reductions in youth crime, school failure and drug abuse.

It is not our intention merely to pay lip service to the community safety partnerships—we are backing up our commitment with hard cash. I was recently able to announce details of a new challenge competition that aims to make our communities safer. A sum of £3 million is being made available in the financial year 2000-01 to support communities in Scotland that want to establish new and innovative projects to contribute to that community's well-being and safety through crime reduction measures.

Of that money, £1.5 million will be available to fund initiatives that fall into the broad category of community safety and the remaining £1.5 million will be specifically to fund CCTV. The community safety part of the competition will provide an added dimension to our efforts to make Scotland safer. Although CCTV has had some limited

criticism, I am convinced—and I believe that the statistics support this—that the camera systems have made a significant contribution to cutting crime throughout Scotland.

We are taking action against drug misuse, which is one of the biggest threats to community safety. Members may or may not be aware that, today, the 108th drug-related death in Strathclyde this year was reported. The damage that drug misuse and dependency does to our community is very visible. We see it in the intimidation and violence that is spawned by drug dealers peddling their trade on our streets. We see it in the threat to our homes and businesses from those who steal to feed their addictions. We see it in the health risks posed by discarded needles and in the direct and corrosive impact that drug misuse and dependency have on our young people. All those have appalling consequences for our communities.

Let me repeat the clear message that the First Minister recently gave to drug dealers. If they are selling drugs, we will direct all our law enforcement agency resources to catch them. If we catch them, we will prosecute them. If they are convicted, we will send them to jail for a long time. While they are in jail, we will do everything in our power to seize the proceeds of their destructive activities. The First Minister added that drug dealers had been corroding our communities and our people for too long, but that all Scotland was united in condemning their evil trade and wanting to work together to stop it.

Tackling drug misuse is at the heart of the Scottish Executive's agenda; we are vigorously undertaking that commitment. We are taking a genuinely cross-departmental and cross-agency approach that cuts across all boundaries. A ministerial committee has been formed to oversee the implementation of drugs strategy. It will provide integrated policy and integrated policy delivery, focusing primarily on results. I chair the committee. It includes ministers involved in education, health, justice and the community, and it reports directly to the Scottish Cabinet.

The "Partnership for Scotland" document sets out the Executive's programme for the next four years. It includes a clear commitment to implement measures to prevent drug abuse. Those measures will be harmonised with other action in our social inclusion agenda.

Tommy Sheridan: Does the minister agree that the 108 premature deaths through drug abuse in Strathclyde alone—we do not yet have the figures for all of Scotland—represent 108 personal and family tragedies? The minister made a point about discarded needles and the people who deal in the drugs of death. Does he agree that the deaths are almost exclusively related to heroin and Temgesic

and that we have to confront the fact that no one has died of cannabis consumption? Until we address the inconsistencies in our drugs laws, we will lose the battle with our young people, who are not listening to us or to our drugs strategy.

Angus MacKay: Matters relating to the legalisation or otherwise of cannabis are reserved to Westminster. However, to pick up on Mr Sheridan's comments, one of the key things that has to be understood and that has to inform all our policy on tackling drug abuse is that there is not just one drug problem in Scotland, there is a multiplicity of drug problems. Whereas the kind of drug-related deaths that Mr Sheridan described have taken place in Strathclyde—and especially in certain parts of Strathclyde—drug-related deaths in other parts of Scotland are caused by the abuse of other drugs and other cocktails of drugs, often in specific ways and in conjunction with alcohol.

In other words, there is no uniform drug problem across Scotland. We have to find solutions that tackle the way in which drugs come on to the market and that take into account the variety of drugs in their different strengths and in different cocktails. We must also put resources at the disposal of the appropriate agencies to help to prevent people from getting into the cycle of drug abuse and to help to rehabilitate people who may have had one of a variety of addictions.

I accept that the vast majority of drug-related deaths in Strathclyde have been caused by the type of drug abuse that Mr Sheridan described. However, across Scotland, a wide variety of patterns of drug abuse has been related to drug deaths. We need a sophisticated approach.

Tommy Sheridan: Can the minister tell me whether anyone in Scotland has died from cannabis consumption?

Angus MacKay: I am not aware of the figures for cannabis abuse, or of the way in which it links with other forms of drug abuse. However, I am aware that all the advice from law enforcement agencies is that fewer drug users use a single drug and more drug users use alcohol, cannabis and harder drugs, such as heroin, in a cocktail. That produces a lethal mixture of dependency and overdose. We must be sophisticated in the way in which we consider the pattern of drug abuse—the issues are not separate in the way that Mr Sheridan describes.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that the lesson from places such as Amsterdam, where cannabis has been legalised and is sold in cafes, is that wherever cannabis is sold, other hard drugs are beneath the counter? Does he agree that the use of cannabis almost inevitably leads to the use of other drugs?

Tommy Sheridan: Is that from personal

experience, Phil?

Angus MacKay: I am tempted to allow Mr Sheridan to intervene again—this is becoming interesting.

I will restate my point. Generally speaking, it is not true that cannabis is used, or misused, in isolation from other drugs. It is true that the pattern of drug abuse in Scotland predominantly and increasingly involves a cocktail of different drugs, which—with the especially pure heroin that has been coming into the country recently—has contributed to the increasing number of drug-related deaths. I cannot comment on the example of Amsterdam, but I am grateful to Mr Gallie for making the point.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green) rose—

Angus MacKay: Not at the moment, Mr Harper—perhaps a little later in the debate.

Our strategy is set out in the document “Tackling Drugs in Scotland: Action in Partnership”, which contains the agreed policy approach for the vast majority of agencies that are in partnership with the Scottish Executive. The strategy includes a wide-ranging programme in the form of national objectives and priorities for action. Protecting communities from drug-related anti-social and criminal behaviour is one of its four overarching aims. Treatment and rehabilitation, education, prevention and enforcement all have a complementary part to play.

The police and other enforcement agencies do sterling and successful work at both national and force level in countering the increase in the volume of drug dealing and trafficking. We are keen to increase the momentum and that is why the “Partnership for Scotland” document includes a commitment to

“take tough action on drug dealers, establish a Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency and step up action to stop drugs coming into Scotland”.

The Executive has made clear its commitment to provide increased resources to establish a Scottish drugs enforcement agency, which will build on the success of the Scottish crime squad and increase the size of drug squads at force level.

Work on that agency is well under way, with the involvement of key enforcement agencies, but considerable planning remains to be done. However, within the next 100 days, I expect to be able to announce details about the structure of the drugs enforcement agency and, within 150 days, we will appoint a chief executive or director to head the agency. Very soon after that, the agency will become operational.

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): Can the

minister assure us that the establishment and manning of the agency, and the increasing number of officers on drugs duties in local forces, will not impact on the number of officers assigned to other non-drugs-related duties? In other words, are the increased resources that the minister mentioned truly additional and not simply a redeployment of existing force strength at a local or national level?

Angus MacKay: I welcome that intervention, because it gives me the opportunity to make clear our cast-iron commitment to provide resources of approximately £4 million—the precise costing still needs to be determined—which will support 200 additional officers. Although we have not yet decided how those officers will be split between the national agency and local forces, it looks as though 100 additional officers will go into the central agency and the other 100 additional officers will go into local constabularies.

We are working with drug action teams in every part of Scotland and with a wide range of organisations to implement our broader drugs strategy and to monitor results. We are investing additional money in drug action team support to assist in implementing the strategy. This week, their resources were doubled to £1 million for local implementation. We will also be seeking to maximise the role that community safety partnerships can play in tackling drug misuse. Furthermore, we have announced that £300,000 will be invested in central research on the effectiveness of drug prevention and rehabilitation treatment.

The Scottish Parliament offers opportunities that have never been available in Scotland before. Not only do we have a Parliament again, but we have a Parliament with the power to set up procedures, which will be considerably more open, to develop and evaluate policy and practice.

The Parliament provides the means to meet quickly and directly the challenges that we will face in the future. I hope that I have given a clear view of the future that we aim to create for crime prevention and community safety. That future will provide us with a unique opportunity to build a truly inclusive society for Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the continuing need to work together for a safer Scotland and acknowledges that the formation of powerful yet practical community safety partnerships, as promoted by the Scottish Executive, provides the means of sustained involvement from all members of our communities and the agencies which serve those communities.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call Phil Gallie to speak to and move his amendment, I want to raise a point. Yesterday afternoon, I had to make it clear that members who speak in a debate are

expected to remain in the chamber for the minister's wind-up speech. The same applies for the opening speech. Members have requested the floor who have not been here for the start of the debate, which means, frankly, that their chances of being called are diminished.

09:54

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): In his opening remarks, the minister suggested that this issue was a top priority with the Scottish Executive. I am extremely disappointed that no other member of the Scottish Executive was in the chamber for the minister's speech.

It is hard to disagree with the motion, because it means all things to all men and shows neither commitment to nor the means of dealing with crime on our streets or in our homes. I am sad to say that the minister's speech did not detract from that perception.

The motion is wishy-washy and means little when it comes to addressing the real concerns of the general public. Our amendment adds teeth to the motion and seeks to ensure that the real problems of crime and crime prevention are dealt with in the chamber today.

I respectfully suggest that the minister should accept our amendment, because surely it is in the interests of everyone in Scotland for the public to respect and have confidence in the law. How can the minister turn his back on such an amendment?

Angus MacKay: One of the reasons why we will not accept the amendment is that its terms are too narrow. The Conservative party's manifesto from the previous set of elections stated that

"public confidence in the police is crucial in the fight against crime".

That is only one part of the broad agenda under discussion today, which is why we will not accept the amendment.

Phil Gallie: I hope to demonstrate that, although I recognise the minister's point, the public need to have confidence in and respect for the whole system—not just the police, but the courts and the procurator system. On that basis, I repeat that the minister must accept our amendment, because otherwise he is saying that those issues are of no importance to the Scottish police. I am sure that he does not believe that in his heart.

Our amendment recognises the dangers of people losing confidence in our system of justice, with the potential for citizens to be driven to a point where they take the law into their own hands. I already hear people saying that that is scaremongering and a fanciful suggestion. However, there is evidence to back up my point. In Kilmarnock, Frank Gilliland perhaps went over the

top in an attempt to protect his property, but he did not deserve to go to jail. A week or two ago, an Aberdeenshire farmer threw dung at youngsters who were terrorising his six children and invalid wife. The farmer ended up in court, but those who were terrorising him did not. Perhaps more serious is the case of the Norfolk farmer who tragically killed an intruder. What pressures was that farmer under at the time and how much did his lack of faith in the justice system lead to that terrible situation?

I accept that there have to be community partnerships and community involvement. I welcomed the neighbourhood watch schemes, which played a part in attempting to contain local crime levels.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Your amendment cuts out initiatives that you now say are worthwhile. I could have accepted your amendment if it had been an add-on to the motion, but I cannot do that because it disregards valuable work on community partnerships.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Jenkins, the amendment is Mr Gallie's, not mine.

Ian Jenkins: I am sorry.

Phil Gallie: I disagree with Mr Jenkins's point, because I deliberately left in the part of the motion that says:

"the Parliament notes the continuing need to work together for a safer Scotland".

I left out the remainder of the motion. As worded, my amendment supports community involvement.

I welcome the existence of community policemen, who are perhaps a replacement for the bobby on the beat whose role has become redundant as a consequence of the change in criminality. Criminals today are highly mobile and policemen cannot be tied down to sticking to the beat.

I recognise the need for co-operation between the police, the procurator's office, the sheriffs, the social workers and the Prison Service. They all have a key role to play in an overall public partnership, but I am concerned about developments in each of those areas, which create an element of doubt and scepticism in the mind of the public.

Police numbers have fallen over the past two years and, before that, Government targets on police manning levels were not met by the local authority-controlled police authorities.

Angus MacKay rose—

Phil Gallie: Strathclyde is 350 officers short. If the minister will acknowledge that that is the case

and tell us what he plans to do to rectify the situation, I am delighted to give way to him.

Angus MacKay: Does Mr Gallie recognise that staffing in the Scottish police forces—civilian support staff and police officers—has risen over the period during which he says the number has declined, from 19,452 in 1998 to 19,509 in the current year? Civilianisation of core staff is a key element in trying to get additional officers out into the communities and into detecting and resolving crime. That is to be welcomed; it represents an entirely different picture from that portrayed by Mr Gallie.

Phil Gallie: I accept the fact that the Administration has replaced experienced, knowledgeable police officers with clerks and other pen-pushers, although I also accept that some of the civilian appointments have been worth while, such as those of the people who look after closed-circuit television systems. The Tory Government pushed for those systems and I hope that this Administration will press on with them.

On the subject of being tough on crime and drugs, I welcome the drugs enforcement agency, but the minister's words today must be challenged. He talked about £4 million being available for setting up that agency and suggested that the agency would not fill the new roles with policemen who are currently in position. Right out of the air, we will pick up 200 highly experienced and knowledgeable police officers and that £4 million will pay for them. A quick calculation shows that that equates to paying those officers a salary of £20,000 a year. A police constable's salary is around £18,000 or £19,000, so I would be delighted if the minister explained how the £4 million that he identified will meet the cost of those 200 police officers.

Angus MacKay: I reiterate my earlier comments. I said approximately £4 million, because, in order to ensure that we can properly resource the additional 200 officers, the full costings have still to be finalised. Further, I made it absolutely clear that those 200 officers would be additional and new. It would be ludicrous to suggest that 200 officers could be created out of thin air; an appropriate strategy for training and developing the additional officers, who will be entering the central drugs enforcement agency and local constabularies, will be required. That will be a matter for discussion with chief constables and the head of the new agency.

Phil Gallie: I accept that perhaps the minister has got his sums wrong. I will do a quick calculation for him. If we are talking about 200 officers, I will use an average salary—bearing in mind the various ranks—of £40,000 a year. That means that the minister will have to double his figure from £4 million to £8 million. We can

guarantee that the required back-up, in terms of civilians and equipment, will cost another £4 million. The minister's sum has tripled in the space of a few minutes; that smacks somewhat of the Executive's plans for the new Scottish Parliament.

Angus MacKay: Those are precisely the economics that got the previous Conservative Government into such hot water in the first place.

Phil Gallie: The minister has already given an adequate demonstration of hogwash economics. Four million pounds will go nowhere towards providing the type of service that he has promised the Scottish public.

The police forces face other burdens. New legislation covering sex offenders and family protection is in place and today the minister mentioned a new act on racial harassment. That all adds to the burden on the police, yet the minister is responsible for a reduction in police numbers. From police sources, I have an estimate that the police service budget faces a shortfall of some £9 million this year. Given that 87 per cent of the police budget goes on manpower, that gives rise to great cause for concern.

The burden on the police does not stop with the number of policemen on the beat or available to the chief constables. A heck of a lot of police hours are wasted in the court system, on waiting for trials to come up and on trials that never take place. The previous Government attempted to deal with that problem by introducing a diet system, but to be truthful, that system does not seem to be working. Perhaps the minister could address that issue in the longer term.

On youth crime, I recall a situation in Ayr some years ago when 700 reported crimes were attributed to 15 young people. The frustration of the police was immense; they pulled the youngsters in and got to the root of a crime, then the youngsters were turned back out to offend again. We may wonder whether such situations are a thing of the past. I was advised by one force that 36 young persons committed 921 crimes; the value of the stolen property associated with those crimes was more than £250,000. Other forces have similar stories to tell.

We are not doing the youngsters any favours. One offender had committed 87 offences before he was 16; since then, in different sheriff courts, he has been convicted on a further 18 occasions. He is serving a six-month prison sentence, having already served a similar sentence. He had appeared before children's panels on 10 previous occasions; it appears that such panels are simply not working for persistent offenders. I draw the minister's attention to that problem and call for an urgent review of the youth justice system. Victims' interests must be represented as well as the

opinions of those tasked with rehabilitation.

Tommy Sheridan: Mr Gallie has condemned young people for their involvement in crime. Will he join me in condemning the crime against young people that was committed by the previous Government, when it removed benefit entitlement for 16 and 17-year-olds?

Phil Gallie: I certainly will not join Mr Sheridan in that, but I join him in having concerns for young people. I believe that the Conservative Government did a heck of a lot to improve the lot of young people, in education and in other ways. We took a stand on benefits. The Labour party criticised that stand at one time, but I suspect that if Mr Sheridan ever reached a position of authority, he, like the Labour party, would backtrack if any attempts were made to change the situation.

Robin Harper *rose*—

Phil Gallie: I will give way in a moment.

The children's panels are failing persistent young offenders who are determined to live a life of crime. We can take great pride in the bulk of our youth. They do not cause trouble, they want to get on with their lives in peace and harmony and they are the ones whom I want to protect. At the same time, the interests of those who are set on the path of crime must be addressed.

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Will Mr Gallie give way?

Phil Gallie: I promised to give way to Mr Harper.

Robin Harper: I have two questions. Does not Mr Gallie agree that, given the many thousands of young people who are dealt with successfully in the children's panel system, it is wrong to quote one instance, such as the one that he mentioned, to condemn the entire system? Secondly, in Scotland, 30 per cent of young people under the age of 15 have tried cannabis. Seventy-five per cent have experimented with alcohol. Which is the biggest problem? Which drug leads to which?

Phil Gallie: I would argue that cannabis is the bigger problem, because it leads to other things. If we legalise cannabis, it will give added impetus to the attraction of trying new and perhaps dangerous drugs.

I was careful in my wording of the point about children's hearings—they are not doing persistent young offenders any good. I recognise that children's panels do a good job for many youngsters by sending a warning shot across their bows. I see that Mr Harper is nodding, so it appears that he accepts that.

The minister said today that there had been something like a 3 or 4 per cent increase in crimes such as housebreaking. However, the figures that I have show that the number of offences involving

offensive weapons has risen by 13 per cent and that assault with intent to rape is up by 12 per cent, non-sexual violent crime is up by 10 per cent, serious assault is up by 9 per cent, robbery is up by 9 per cent and sexual assaults are up by 9 per cent. Those figures are totally different from those presented by the minister. Where did he get his facts? I can justify where mine came from.

To understand the public's perception of justice, it is essential to examine the trends in our courts. We must consider examples such as the one involving two youths who beat up and killed a youth who was a neighbour. What happened to them? They got 300 hours' community service. That hardly seems to be justice. I have now learned that the two youths are appealing against the severity of their sentence. The minister should go away and tell his friend and fellow member of the Executive, the Lord Advocate, to ensure that the Crown appeals against the leniency of that sentence.

There was also the case of the grandmother who used her granddaughter to attempt to smuggle drugs into Cornton Vale prison. Her solicitor's advice was that she could expect her sentence to be about 18 months. What did she get? She got a suspended sentence and was sent back to her granddaughter. What future does that give her granddaughter, if her grandmother's example is anything to go by?

Drugs in prisons are a curse. The inspector of prisons' recent report demonstrated that the major problem in prisons is drug abuse. How can that be? Why can we not achieve drug-free prisons? If we cannot achieve a drug-free environment there, how can we achieve it in society at large—in our schools, for example? It is just not on.

I recognise the problem of drugs being taken into prisons. Perhaps we need to take a harder line. We need to consider prison visits, for example, and decide whether every prisoner should be entitled to open visits. Perhaps they should be earned—a reward for prisoners. Without a doubt, visiting time is when drugs enter prisons and are handed over. The Executive has a responsibility to keep everyone in prison safe and to help prisoners to mend their ways, so that they can return to society in the long term.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I agree with Mr Gallie that drugs are an extremely serious problem in prisons. I recently visited Saughton prison and saw just how serious the problem there is. Does he agree that we must ensure that prisoners who have the guts to try to get off drugs in prison have counselling, full support and rehabilitation and that the various fellowships, such as Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous, are allowed into prisons? Prisoners need such support and counselling,

which they are not getting at the moment.

Phil Gallie: It delights me to be able to agree on this rare occasion almost whole-heartedly with Mr Raffan's comments. I, too, visited Saughton prison some years ago and saw new drugs rehabilitation programmes being introduced. The Justice and Home Affairs Committee should perhaps visit the prison to examine the ways in which drugs problems are being treated, as Mr Raffan appears to suggest that the high hopes of some four or five years ago have not been met.

Tommy Sheridan: A couple of members have talked about visiting Saughton, so I thought that I would come to my feet, as I visited the prison myself a number of years ago. [*Laughter.*]

Seriously though, is Mr Gallie aware that the main problem with the rise in the drugs problem in our prisons, according to the inspector of prisons' report, is the increase in the incidence of heroin abuse? Would he care to comment on why that is? Why has drug consumption moved from softer drugs to heroin?

Phil Gallie: That is the inevitable path. There is a link. People start on softer drugs, work their way through the leisure drugs, and all too frequently end on the heroin trail.

Tommy Sheridan rose—

Phil Gallie: The gentleman has just finished an intervention in which he referred to his visit to Saughton some years ago. That happened because he failed to pay his dues to society. If he had, there might have been more money in the public coffers to meet the cost of benefit payments for young people.

Tommy Sheridan: Mr Gallie is wrong on both counts, but sometimes he is ignorant of some of the arguments in this chamber. I was not imprisoned for failing to pay my dues. I was in prison for breaching a court order that prevented me from stopping a warrant sale. Mr Gallie will be pleased to know, however, that the warrant sale did not take place, as we did prevent it.

Mr Gallie did not answer my question correctly. If he were aware of the detailed report of the inspector of prisons, he would know that the reason why heroin is abused more in prisons today is that it is not as detectable in the blood long term, whereas cannabis remains in the blood for several months. Prisoners are therefore moving from consuming cannabis to consuming heroin. That is the problem with drugs testing in our prisons.

Phil Gallie: I am sorry if I got the original reason for Mr Sheridan being in prison wrong. My understanding was that it was for failure to pay poll tax, but if he paid up and everything was fine, I accept his comment.

Drugs testing is certainly a factor in the shift towards heroin, and I am sure that the Justice and Home Affairs Committee will consider that issue. I trust that the Executive will do the same. I trust too, however, that Tommy Sheridan agrees that it is well worth carrying out drugs testing in prisons. Labour members on my left opposed such testing at one time in the not too distant past.

Tommy Sheridan: They are not on your left any more, Phil.

Phil Gallie: That is welcome. It is good that they have seen the light, Tommy. Perhaps one day there will be a wee halo round your head when you, too, go down the path of righteousness.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson): Comments should be made through the chair, please. Will you wind up now?

Phil Gallie: I will, but I see that Roseanna Cunningham is shaking her head. Does she object to my hoping to convert Tommy Sheridan?

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): No. I just want you to wind up.

Members: Wind up.

Phil Gallie: I am not aware of a time limit.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Gallie, will you wind up, please, and refer your remarks through the chair?

Phil Gallie: All right then.

The public see the problems in our prisons, and problems with rewards and with sentencing. They cannot understand why people who are sentenced to four years in prison come out after two. We must examine that issue.

I welcome the minister's recently announced intention to consider drug confiscation and the policies that are pursued in Ireland. If he is able to move the Executive into taking action on such policies, he will do much to improve the situation on drugs in Scotland and will remove some of the drug barons' standing in society, which we must erode.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Gallie, will you please come to a close now?

Phil Gallie: I also wish to mention trivia in our courts—trivia that saw the lack of a birth certificate allow someone who had sex with a minor to escape scot-free and that allowed someone who carried heroin within his body to escape scot-free because of a wrong signature on a warrant. I look to the Crown Office and to the way in which summary courts are used—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Gallie, will you come to a close now?

Phil Gallie: I look to many other aspects of Crown Office involvement, in crimes where the public are sold short.

Again, I ask the minister to support the amendment and to put justice back on track.

I move amendment S1M-163.1, to leave out from "formation" to end and insert:

"principal means of achieving this is to ensure public respect and confidence in the justice system."

10:21

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): It is rather unfortunate to have to follow such a bizarre speech. I am tempted to suggest that we should treat such contributions as little more than entertainment. Frankly, there is very little practical value to be gained from that sort of rambling.

The SNP recognises that there is little to object to in the Executive's motion and my comments are predicated on a basis of general support for community initiatives. Anything that helps to bolster communities is to be welcomed. In truth, it could—and probably will—be argued that it is the very destruction of communities that, over the years, has led to the near breakdown of civil society in some parts of Scotland's urban areas.

The previous Government deliberately brought about much of that destruction. Its ideological obsessions led it to disregard totally the enormous benefits to be gained from thriving local communities. I note with interest that the Tory amendment removes all mention of community from the Executive's motion—that seems rather apt, given the Conservative party's history in respect of community.

A number of specific crime prevention ideas have already been canvassed and no doubt more will be raised today. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the most effective crime prevention methods involve providing jobs and futures for people who may feel that they are no longer part of society. It has become fashionable to call them the socially excluded. The more old-fashioned of us may prefer to use the simple term poverty—economic poverty and social poverty. In my view, until we tackle poverty we will fail to achieve the real success that, presumably, we all want.

This is not the first debate on this subject in which I have been involved. I was involved in a similar debate in the Scottish Grand Committee on 16 June 1998, which dealt with the prevention of crime and—fascinatingly—the then justice minister, Henry McLeish, used the opportunity to announce the publication of

"a strategy for action on community safety".

The strategy was

"designed to improve community safety in Scotland through partnerships between public, private and voluntary bodies."

It was to encourage

"local authorities to take the lead in forming local partnerships, involving the police and other bodies who can influence community safety."

During the debate, Mr McLeish said that the strategy did not

"say exactly what should be done. That must be decided locally, in the light of local needs and opportunities, and as part of other local policies."

It is fair to say that the subject that we are discussing today does not involve anything startlingly new. It does, however, give rise to some pertinent questions, particularly in the light of another comment made by the then justice minister. He expected

"to see results from these partnerships we want real action, not planning documents."—[*Official Report, House of Commons, Scottish Grand Committee*, 16 June 1998; c 3-4.]

In fairness, I suppose that a guidance document is not a planning document. However, in the spirit of the assertions made by the then justice minister, I want to make a few inquiries of the Deputy Minister for Justice—in particular about the community safety partnerships that are mentioned in his motion. He may be able to answer some of my questions today—I will be happy for him to write to me separately if he does not have all the information to hand.

Can the minister give members an idea of the extent of uptake by various local bodies in response to the strategy, which is now more than a year old? Is there variation from area to area? If there is, are there any patterns to that variation? It would be reasonable to infer from the earlier safer Scotland document and this more recent publication that more emphasis has been placed on the perceived problems of urban communities, as opposed to rural communities, regarding access to resources and facilities for partnership projects. Is the emphasis a direct result of a variation in response from the start? If it is not, is there not a danger that rural communities will miss out? Will the minister ensure that uptake of the strategy is monitored?

On the basis of initial feedback which, I presume, has been undertaken in the past year, can an estimate be made of the likely long-term effectiveness of the scheme? How is it intended that that effectiveness will be monitored? What proposals are there to ensure that we receive regular updates on a number of factors, so that we are told how effective the strategy is?

I, too, have questions on policing. I hope that I

will put my questions more constructively than have some others. Will the success or failure of individual community safety partnerships have an effect on the level of policing in a given area? On a point of more general concern to those of us who have to deal with rural communities in our constituencies, will the minister—today or in the future—make a statement on rural police provision? That was a concern at last year's Scottish Grand Committee debate. I suspect that it is still a concern, even among the minister's back-bench members who represent rural communities.

We all agree that public confidence is vital. There is little doubt that the public wants more bobbies on the beat. Manned police stations and regular patrols, by foot or car—although most people prefer police to be on foot—give a feeling that help is close at hand and that the police are acting as a deterrent to crime. Fear of crime is debilitating and often leads to people being trapped in their homes after dark, afraid to live normal lives. Visible policing helps to reduce that fear considerably. One of the most unfortunate trends in policing, which many members will recognise, is the reduction in visible policing and the reduction in manned police stations in rural areas.

Most people accept that there is an incongruity between public perception and what the police claim is the reality of how they have to operate in the modern day. Public confidence is paramount in such matters, and if that means playing a little to perception, I would say, so be it. The reduction in manned rural police stations has caused great concern in my constituency and, I suspect, throughout other rural areas, and in the commuter villages of the central belt. Few issues cause more concern, or bring people to constituency surgeries faster, than a threat to a local police station.

In last year's debate, I mentioned that Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary had used mobile police stations to ensure a regular presence in many smaller villages and hamlets. I understand that the initiative proved immensely popular. The mobile stations apparently made about 80 visits each month to smaller communities.

Tayside Police now has a limited ability to do something similar, which it has tried in some of the housing estates in Perth. It would be useful if the minister could address that sort of flexibility for the police as it is well worth considering implementing the initiative throughout Scotland. It would encourage public confidence and remove some of the fears felt by communities left without a permanent police presence. Although I have focused more closely on the challenge of rural policing, I know that most of what I say could apply fairly well to urban communities. I expect that other members may wish to pick on this point.

Closed-circuit television is another important factor in crime prevention and community safety. Applications for CCTV are increasing. I do not know the current total of applications, but I dare say that it is considerable and that many have been submitted at the instigation of communities. My argument is that the increase in demand for CCTV has been fuelled partly by the public's desire for what they regard as a second-best option to the bobby on the beat.

I feel sure that if there were a more widespread police presence, the demand for CCTV would not be so great. Much of the increase in CCTV in smaller towns and villages has come about because of the reduced police presence. In most cases, CCTV has been a success—I think we all agree on that. Crime rates are generally lower, although there are occasional signs of criticism, and public confidence is higher.

Yet again, however, I very gently push for a consideration of the regulation of the spread and use of CCTV. The rapid growth in use is taking place in a legislation-free zone and the undoubted effectiveness of the technology should not relieve us of our responsibility to ensure that there is minimal abuse and misuse of CCTV. There are no real safeguards, and there is no real monitoring of the extent of its use. Although local authorities and the police may make applications, it is clear that, in private areas, CCTV is going in almost unmonitored. The police and local authorities are unlikely to object to regulatory measures. They might broadly welcome them, because they would deal with some of the cowboys who are moving into the market.

Community safety and crime prevention must cover security in the home as well as on the streets. People have the right to feel safe in their own homes. Unfortunately, for women in particular, that right can be nothing other than a fond hope. I do not want to trespass on the Justice and Home Affairs Committee's current work, but I want to welcome initiatives such as those pioneered by Fife Council, to establish specific domestic violence units which combine the expertise of the police and social work departments and deal exclusively with domestic violence. The most recent figures show a higher number of prosecutions for domestic violence in the region and help to create a fuller picture of its frequency and extent. Much domestic violence is unreported and sometimes hospital admissions are the only real measure of its incidence.

Angus MacKay: I am grateful to Roseanna for giving me an opportunity to respond to a number of her points. I am sure that she is aware that the Scottish Executive is participating in the Scottish partnership on domestic violence and in the ongoing consultation. We are playing an active role

and I welcome her comments.

It is right to say that there is a high volume of demand for CCTV, but that relates to the success of the CCTV schemes in 99 per cent of the areas in which they have been introduced. On a note of caution, I do not think that it is entirely accurate to say that CCTV is seen as a replacement for officers on the beat.

Police forces are clear that the implementation of CCTV has allowed for more effective use of officer time because they can be directed through command and control structures to particular areas. CCTV has allowed the police to free resources to be used elsewhere. That important point is perhaps not part of the public's awareness. CCTV schemes that are funded and authorised by the Scottish Executive are governed by a code of practice. All users are bound to sign up to that code as a condition of receipt of grant.

I have some information on community safety partnerships to hand. There are 32 partnerships at present and they have recently been surveyed. We will consider their long-term effectiveness through a proper system of audit. It is worth making the point that all the partnerships that have started to bed down have tried to do so with a proper reporting relationship direct to the Scottish Executive. We want to ensure that best practice is replicated in all the existing partnerships, and in the areas where they are not properly up and running at the moment.

Roseanna Cunningham: I am grateful for the minister's remarks. I will ask him for more detail on how the Executive plans to monitor the partnerships. I do not disagree with what he says about CCTV, but the issue is that whereas the police see it as an operational tool, the public often sees it as a second-best option. We must remember that it is possible for our perceptions of an appropriate way to proceed to run ahead of the public's—not just in this area, but in many others too. We run into that all the time and we need to learn how to take the public with us to ensure that people's confidence is not dented. Many of the demands for CCTV—particularly in smaller communities—arise because people feel that they have insufficient policing. They may be right or wrong in feeling that, but that is how the demands come about.

I will return to my remarks on domestic violence in Fife. The subject is important, because it is about crime in the home. Effective police and social work intervention undoubtedly has a deterrent effect and it is essential that such successful programmes are enabled across Scotland and not confined to one or two areas. There is significant cross-party consensus on this matter. We agree about the need for emergency residential accommodation, safe homes, crisis

telephone lines and for all the other things that have been flagged up as absolutely necessary to tackle this particular crime. I hope that practical measures such as those will be introduced as part of the community safety initiative.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced anti-social behaviour orders, which it was hoped would be an effective tool in the community armoury. I hope that the minister will be able to indicate the extent to which they have been used by local authorities in Scotland since their inception. I ask, because at a recent meeting with officials from Perthshire Housing Association, it was suggested that local authorities' resource difficulties mean that the orders are not being used. If that is true, it is a great pity.

Can community safety partnerships increase the number of anti-social behaviour orders and the number of individuals willing to come forward as witnesses? No matter what has been done so far to deal with anti-social neighbours, getting people to come forward remains one of the major stumbling blocks. The new mechanisms were meant to offer more flexibility than the alternative of eviction, but that does not seem to be happening in practice. We still have the cumbersome procedures that were meant—in part—to be replaced. I hope that there is some monitoring of the use and effectiveness of anti-social behaviour orders and some reconsideration of the difficulties that local authorities may be experiencing obtaining them. If there are difficulties, will the minister commit himself to ensuring that the problems are addressed?

The minister referred to drugs. There is cross-party agreement about the significant problems of drugs on our streets. I would distinguish—as I think would the minister—between the dealers and the users. The approach ought to be tough on dealers, and tough on the causes of users, but more constructive about the users themselves.

The SNP has talked about drugs courts as a way of tackling the drug-related crime that users indulge in to finance their habits. I hope that whatever proposals are made will distinguish between dealers and users so that some of the measures that were referred to earlier can be introduced—even in prison. I certainly wish to associate myself with the remarks made by Mr Raffan, who obviously wants to speak again.

Mr Raffan: Does Ms Cunningham agree that it makes no sense to send drug addicts who are guilty of minor offences to prison, where drugs may be more easily available than they are on the street? It makes much more sense to send them to treatment centres—if the beds are available. It is a scandal that there are only 120 residential beds in Scotland at the moment. After treatment, users can return to the community—hopefully in

full mental and physical health—and, in recovery, contribute to the community. That is more cost effective than sending addicts to prison.

Roseanna Cunningham: I wholeheartedly agree. The drugs courts idea is to remove offenders from the direct road to prison at the point where a prison sentence is likely to be the next one to be handed down. Many drug users appear in courts and are not charged specifically with drug crime. They appear for shoplifting, theft and other offences. The offenders for whom the real problem is drugs need to be identified and fast-tracked out of prison. For those who end up with sentences of four, six or nine months, prison is the least effective place in which to be treated. There are problems to be overcome in the treatment of drug users and the management of the rehabilitation process. The minister wishes to respond.

Angus MacKay: I am grateful for the opportunity to comment. The drug treatment and testing order regime that is being introduced in Glasgow directly addresses the issue raised by Mr Raffan.

While we do not at present have drug courts in Scotland, there are a number of pilot projects, which will be reviewed, to test the effectiveness of diversion from the courts in terms of savings in court resources, freeing of court time and providing appropriate rehabilitative treatment for offenders to ensure that the vicious circle is broken.

Roseanna Cunningham: We are all trying to find the best solution for what we recognise is a serious problem. It will help if we are as constructive as possible about projected solutions.

Community safety is about tying together the various strands of public concern. It is about building confidence in the systems that we put in place for protection and punishment. It is as much about local initiatives to tackle vandalism through education as it is about grand strategies—such as the zero tolerance campaign—that affect the quality of life of most citizens.

I have highlighted some local initiatives that have been successful on a small scale, but which could be extended nationwide. They show the effectiveness of co-ordination of effort and the importance of dialogue.

Today's debate and the community safety initiative that is being pursued by the Executive are only small parts of that larger dialogue. As I said at the start of my speech, the larger dialogue is about giving people back their hope and belief in their futures. Only an end to deprivation and poverty can bring that.

10:42

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I come to this debate with some trepidation and anxiety. It is my view that there are no easy fixes in this debate—there are no easy answers. People who seem so certain on subjects such as this—subjects that are so complex—always worry me.

I have been on a steep learning curve since becoming an MSP, and the issues of crime and community safety have been raised time and again by my constituents. They are the issues that are raised most consistently by victims of crime and—more often—by people who live in communities that experience disorder and harassment by young people.

As the minister said, it is clear that crime is linked to poverty and deprivation; but it is also true that the victims of crime and community disorder are often the most vulnerable and poorest people in society. The challenge for us is to recognise the importance of joined-up action between and across communities and Government.

I want to raise two important issues. The first is drugs. A report by the greater Glasgow drugs action team has shown that experimenting with illegal drugs is equally common in all communities, but that people who live in the most disadvantaged parts of greater Glasgow are more than 30 times more likely to be admitted to hospital in a drugs-misuse-related emergency than those who live in the most affluent areas. Everyone experiments, but the poor die.

We must also recognise that youngsters from families in which there are serious addiction problems are experimenting with drugs. The problem is related to poverty and I welcome the role of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee in tackling it. The statistics are frightening, and represent tragic events for many families. I welcome the attack on drug dealers and the establishment of a drug enforcement agency.

The report also surveyed people in Glasgow who inject drugs. They reported that they had—on average—committed 26 offences in the previous month in order to feed their habits. While we take on the dealers, we must also address the rest of the problem: we must recognise that addiction-driven criminal acts will stop only when addiction stops.

The second issue that I want to raise is youth crime and disorder, which is consistently raised with me by elderly people. It ranges from low-level nuisance behaviour to under-age drinking, harassment and the targeting of older people. It can cause horrific stress and distress. To some young people, it is a sport and they do it because they have the power to do it. It is a form of bullying and it is the same kind of use of power that we see

in domestic violence. It is unacceptable. We must recognise that that kind of behaviour exists. It must be addressed.

I spoke to a member of the children's panel for my area yesterday and she told me that referrals to the panel are increasingly serious. That makes me anxious. One of the strengths of the children's panel system is that it can intervene early. It can deal with and support youngsters who are beginning to get into troubling behaviour. If the referrals are serious, the youngsters must be much further along the road and it is unlikely that they can be helped.

The panel member also reported that most cases are still about care and protection. There are questions of physical abuse, neglect and sexual abuse of young people. We should remember that the most dangerous place that many of our children can be in is their own home.

I welcome the overall strategy that the Government has presented. We must strike a balance between technological developments in CCTV and community safety initiatives and forums such as the one in my area. Communities often seek low-level, person-centred initiatives that can make a real difference to the lives of ordinary people. We must have confidence in the judicial system and we should talk to children's panels to examine how they can be supported in their positive work with young people.

It is important to work with young people. They are often stigmatised—they are seen on a street corner and immediately regarded as the problem.

Tommy Sheridan: I thank the member for giving way as I appreciate that she is near the end of her speech. Will she join me in criticising the local authority in Glasgow for the dearth of youth services in parts of her constituency, in particular in Pollok ward, which I represent on the city council? Pollok has a population of 7,500 and has no community centre—both were closed in 1997 by the city council. Will Johann Lamont join me in criticising those actions?

Johann Lamont: The Labour Government has recognised, as I do, that people are in positions where they must make hard decisions. Local councils have also recognised that. We know the difficulties that local councils have faced in the recent past. We also recognise that things are moving forward through initiatives being taken to support local government in recognition of the particular problems that Glasgow faced as a result of council reorganisation. Changes will be made.

My experience of working with young people shows that they often cannot use facilities in communities because other young people prevent them from doing so. There is a kind of bullying that is complex and requires more than throwing

community workers at it, although they have an important role to play.

We must talk to young people through the youth parliament and youth network organisations such as the one in Glasgow. We must talk to young people who care about their communities and about how they are presented—the young people whose agenda is to deal with and challenge the other young people in the communities who cause as many problems for young people as they do for the elderly.

We must talk to young people not only about the problems they create or are perceived as creating, but about their potential and their agenda on what they think Scotland can do for them. That will ensure that our communities no longer suffer the blight that they now endure.

Young people know about community safety as well as anyone else. It is essential to any strategy that we work with them and support them in initiatives that will make a difference to their future.

10:48

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire (LD): This is an important debate and it is a pity that there are distractions in Harrogate and Inverness, but I welcome the fact that it is taking place and I welcome the Executive's motion.

There is widespread agreement that the best way to fight crime is to tackle its causes in the community. We must concentrate on detection and prevention and keep police services up to strength. I note that numbers have declined by about 130 since September 1997. That is a matter that I would like the minister to address in his winding-up speech.

We must, of course, use new technology to cut bureaucracy and free police officers' time for other duties.

We must ensure that every rural community has a named community officer. That is already happening in many communities. I attended a rural agricultural show on the border between Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway; the community officer was there. It is important that there is a visible police presence in rural areas.

There should also be a named officer for each beat in urban areas. That is an important objective. I agree with Roseanna Cunningham that one of the biggest causes of concern over policing is when a manned station closes, or when a station is not manned for a sufficient number of hours. Nothing undermines people's confidence more than telephoning their local station, only to be routed somewhere else because there is no one there. That issue needs to be tackled.

The Liberal Democrats want to retain the present number of police forces in Scotland, but we must identify more opportunities for joint operations and for procuring equipment and services across the English-Scottish border. Greater co-operation with constabularies in the north of England would assist crime prevention in the south of Scotland.

We back the use of CCTV with appropriate safeguards for civil liberties. We should also encourage the use of better home security systems. There are perhaps ways of building on the home energy efficiency scheme, for example by asking project co-ordinators to address the provision of home security with the aid of grants.

Better street lighting in some communities would be valuable. It is the cause of some regret that, in recent years, local authorities have had to cut the provision of street lighting in certain areas or have not maintained it to the highest standard. The police have achieved some success through targeting specific types of crime. In the Scottish Borders, they have made special efforts in several areas, particularly house-breaking, which have yielded significant dividends. There should be further targeting.

The biggest form of crime prevention is detection. Detection ensures that the criminal does not want to commit crime. It is the key element in policing. In the Scottish Borders, the detection rate has risen to 53 per cent—a remarkable achievement—but still only a bare majority of crimes are reported. As a senior police officer said to me recently, the police cannot do it all on their own; they need public assistance.

Crime prevention should be the duty of every citizen. I sincerely hope that we never become a society that is prepared to pass by on the other side. Working in partnership with the police is extremely important, and we should encourage greater participation in organisations such as children's panels. It is a cause of some concern that, locally, a significant advertising campaign is being used to try to recruit people to children's panels. We should look to better means of encouraging participation in such organisations.

We must encourage more reporting of crime and ensure that witnesses feel safe when they are giving evidence. We do not pay sufficient attention to their safety and confidence when giving evidence. We should perhaps develop the role of the police family liaison officer to assist people to come to terms with reporting and giving evidence on crime. The sheriff court users' group of the Scottish Consumer Council has, for a long time, advocated that there should be assistance in courts for witnesses—some form of guide or court assistant to help people through the process of giving evidence. For some people, giving evidence

is the first occasion on which they have been in court.

Crime prevention must start early. That fact was brought home to me recently, when I was reading statistics on domestic violence. Out of 2,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 21, half the boys and a third of the girls who were interviewed believed that in some circumstances it is acceptable for a man to hit a woman. If that is what some young people believe, it shows the amount of work that we need to do. That is why the community safety forums are particularly valuable: they bring agencies together and they make the best use of the available expertise.

A community safety forum in the Borders has a youth awareness training course. Unfortunately, it lasts only three days—and it is held annually. It involves six police officers talking to 12 young people and taking them through a variety of experiences. I would be grateful for the minister's comments on that. More investment in that type of area would be valuable, as would more encouragement for the community safety forums in promoting an awareness of crime prevention and an awareness of what should be happening among young people.

10:55

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I shall refer to the document "Safer communities in Scotland", although I found the managerial jargon that it contains a bit of a headache. I hope that it is easier for the public at large to understand—maybe it is an age thing, but I used to speak English. I do not know to which language such jargon belongs.

I refer to page 9 of that document. Under the heading "Developing a successful partnership", the document describes the findings of an audit, entitled "Safety in Numbers", that was carried out in England and Wales. One or two concerns are highlighted. The review

"found that many strategies do not reflect

- local people's priorities;
- are weak on the causes of crime;
- fail to invest sufficiently in prevention".

I stop at those three concerns, as I want to focus on crime prevention—in particular, the prevention of youth crime. The minister said that the level of crime is falling, but he was referring to the level of reported crimes. I suspect that many people nowadays, for a variety of reasons, do not report criminal offences on the lower scale. They do not call the police, because the police do not have a swift response time.

Youth crime affects all manner of communities,

both urban and rural. I welcome the fact that this document recognises the differences between rural and urban communities in regard to the criminal activities that take place within them and the policing that is required. We have all seen examples of petty vandalism, from a wheelie bin being taken halfway down the street to the acts of major vandalism by young people that usually take place at dusk during the school holidays.

The key to tackling youth crime, which has been identified by members today, is intervention at the earliest possible stage—and early means really early. Before I was a lawyer I was a schoolteacher. I remember seeing a five-year-old in the playground who was well on the way to a professional criminal career, and that is what happened. For some people, criminal behaviour starts pre-school, and we should identify the factors that make youngsters commit crimes.

I am glad that you are back, Phil. We cannot look for the illusionary quick fix. Phil Gallie is a great tabloid man, looking for short, sharp shocks, shots across bows and all that stuff. Those would have some merit if they worked. They do not work, and they do not pretend to address the causes of juvenile crime.

Phil Gallie *rose—*

Christine Grahame: I shall give way in a moment. Let me get going a wee bit. I have sat through an awful lot of your speech, Phil.

We recognise that it is human, when we see someone vandalising property—particularly our own car tyres or something—to want to go out and kill that person. That is an animal reaction; it is not the reaction of a civilised society in dealing with the offender, nor does it serve the interests of the community. I am pleased that the report addresses social inclusion—I am getting used to using such buzz expressions now—because a great deal of youth crime depends on family background, what happens at school, friends, one's self-evaluation, peer and community influence, and whether the offender lives in a neighbourhood in which taking drugs is standard. I am not excusing youth crime; I am explaining it, Phil. Those factors must be at the core of crime prevention requirements of the young offender.

Phil Gallie: Will Christine Grahame give way?

Christine Grahame: Yes. I shall now.

Phil Gallie: I do not disagree with much of what Christine Grahame has said about the problems of youth and the way in which they must be treated. I majored on the persistent young offender who has accrued a track record of 87 offences, goes from 10 children's panels hearings—which have no effect—to the courts, and ends up in jail. We have not done him any favours, and we have not done

society any favours.

Christine Grahame: Phil Gallie took the words right out of my mouth. We will not have done such people any favours because we are not attacking youth crime in the right manner. Incarcerating people is not the right thing to do; prisons tend to become universities of crime, from which people graduate with better information and tricks than they went in with, and probably with worse drug problems too.

I commend the children's panel system. It may be creaking at the seams now, but it was a great innovation in Scotland in 1971. It endeavoured to take children out of the penal system and to deal holistically—to use another buzz expression—with crime. Families attended and people all around tried to get to the bottom of what was wrong with the children to make them act as they did.

In recent years, however, and particularly under the Conservatives, there has been a shift towards a more punitive disposal of young offenders, which does not work. After the dreadful murder of Jamie Bulger, John Major said that we should condemn more and understand less. How misguided. We can do both; we can condemn more and understand more, and that is the key to the solution.

Phil Gallie should beware making judgments on cases based on what he reads in the papers. He should read the evidence; our sheriffs are not all bampots. We need an informed understanding of juvenile crime so that our disposal can be informed. That is not to say that we should go soft on crime, just as an informed debate on increasing drug problems should not be described as being soft on drugs. We should not back off from those important and complex issues. This Parliament should address them and come up with adult responses to them.

I welcome the involvement of voluntary sector organisations such as Victim Support, Safeguarding Communities Reducing Offending and Barnardo's. Barnardo's has been running a programme for young offenders that has delivered a success rate of 60 per cent non-offending after four years. That is a good hit rate, and I hope that the Justice and Home Affairs Committee will consider that work in its discussions on youth offending.

That leads me to "Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland Report for 1998-1999", which does not contain such good news for the Executive. On page 21, there is a report of an inspection conducted in May 1998 at Polmont young offenders institution. The facility was 12 per cent overpopulated, and the report states:

"Of more immediate concern, some 25% of the population were lying idle on a daily basis, either because

there was not enough work or because there were insufficient places for them on offending behaviour and other programmes. This is a situation which is unacceptable, both in terms of each offender's needs and of the potential long term impact that this is likely to have on communities throughout Scotland when they are released."

We should not just be preventing youth crime, we should do something once young offenders are in prison, but we are not doing it.

Page 20 of the prison report says of Glenochil:

"The facilities in the YOI reflected the lack of investment and the low priority which has been given to YOs generally."

On pages 15 and 16, on Longriggend, it says of the chief inspector's concerns:

"Paramount amongst these was the lack of a national strategy for young offenders and young remands".

Further on, in relation to drugs, it says:

"On the other hand, we felt that the treatment of drug withdrawal problems was still relatively perfunctory."

I have lifted those quotations out of the report, but I am sure that members are familiar with it. We must address those issues. We must not concentrate only on keeping people out of prison before they get established on the road to crime; if we put young people into custody, we cannot leave them to rot and learn bad tricks. I ask the Executive to take account of that.

11:04

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I support the Executive motion with its emphasis on community, and I regret the way in which the Tory amendment has resorted to a one-club policy of concentrating on the criminal justice system. As Johann Lamont said, we are dealing with a complex matter, and addressing the criminal justice system is certainly one of many policies that must be carried out.

I do not think that the Executive is failing. Angus MacKay emphasised the strong measures that are being taken against drug dealers, and I am sure that every member of this Parliament fully supports the Executive's efforts. The reality, however, is that, no matter how tough we are, we will not solve the drugs problem with just one policy. I am sure that the Executive recognises that.

Education is important in addressing the problem of drugs. In talking about drugs, we should widen the definition to include, for example, alcohol. I was struck by a speech that the deputy chief constable of Lothian and Borders police made last week, in which he pointed out that alcohol is a factor in 60 to 70 per cent of homicides, 75 per cent of stabbings and 50 per

cent of all crime. That problem is a great challenge for us.

In addressing the education problem, we must look at evidence of what works. More generally, all crime policy must be based on evidence. Since 1997, the Labour Government has moved towards basing crime policy on evidence, and it should be congratulated on that achievement.

The sort of practical measures to which Angus MacKay referred go some way to solving the problem. I welcome the £3 million that is being allocated to provide such practical measures as closed-circuit television. Again, people must look at the evidence, which suggests that, while CCTV may not be a panacea, it is effective. Other practical measures include better locks on houses and better street lighting. The jargon calls all that target hardening, and the evidence shows that those measures have a quantifiable effect on reducing crime.

At the heart of the Executive motion is the prominence that is given to community safety partnerships. I welcome the one in Edinburgh and the local one in my constituency in the north of Edinburgh. It is important to involve local people in the solutions to problems. As Johann Lamont rightly said, it is local communities—and particularly the poorest people in those communities—that bear the brunt of crime. That is why we who represent those people are right to be tough on crime.

We must not forget, however, the underlying relationship, emphasised by Angus MacKay, between crime and poverty. The whole development of social policy is crucially important in crime prevention. A simple measure such as providing more nursery education has been shown to have an effect on reducing crime.

As a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I would like to throw in two other dimensions. The first is the issue of crime and race. Next week, we shall be questioning Jim Wallace about the Macpherson report. We must all be committed to taking action to prevent the appalling crimes of racial harassment and racial violence that scar our society. I think that the Executive's response to the Macpherson report has been important, although some of us think that it should go further in some regards.

The other issue about which the Equal Opportunities Committee is concerned is the question of crime and gender. To put it simply, men are far more involved in crime than women are. There is also a problem of male violence against women, and I welcome the work that the Justice and Home Affairs Committee has done on that. I am sure that members will support developments that will enable all women to benefit

from interdict orders so that they will have protection from harassment by violent partners.

The Equal Opportunities Committee wants to examine the whole development of the strategy to combat violence against women. Quite rightly, people in this Parliament have emphasised the importance of services and the importance of better funding for Women's Aid and for rape crisis centres. I and many others will demand that that issue be addressed in this year's spending round.

We realise that we must deal with the causes of the problem. We must also emphasise the importance of preventing crime. The work of Zero Tolerance, for example, is fundamentally important. Next Thursday, the organisation will be holding a meeting here in Parliament about Respect, a new campaign developed to challenge the common attitudes that many men have towards women. I hope that many members will attend the presentation and will support the campaign.

As I said during the debate on domestic violence that Maureen Macmillan introduced, I hope that Zero Tolerance will be fully involved in the development of the Scottish Executive's strategy to tackle violence against women, because there have been some problems with that in the past. I hope we all recognise the central importance of preventing crime. That is why this morning's debate is so important. Of course we have to address problems in the criminal justice system, but we must also look at the underlying causes of crime and deal with them.

11:10

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): I agree with Malcolm Chisholm's final remark on the importance of this debate. Yet what do we find? Where are Jim Wallace and Donald Dewar? There is only a deputy minister sitting in the front row and the attendance generally is sparse.

All of us received the document "Making it work together". The word justice is at the top of the list of issues on the cover. Inside the document are a number of pledges, some of which are welcome. I do not deny that but I do question some of the statements made in it. We are told:

"We will promote effective measures to support the victims of crime. We will further protect our communities through the rehabilitation of offenders. We will be tough on crime and on criminals."

How tough? This morning we have been going round in circles and toughness is lacking. There have been only two or three speeches with any realism in them; some of the interjections have had touches of realism as well.

In the document there is a photograph of Jim

Wallace chatting to two police officers. Again, where is he today? Where is Donald Dewar? Are they in Hamilton South perhaps? The document says:

"We will work together with the police and with communities to make our streets and neighbourhoods safe."

That means attacking the drugs menace that is blighting our society and it means being tough on criminals. I agree with the idea of drugs courts, which are long overdue and should be targeted at big-time dealers. They should be fast-track courts with no juries, like the Diplock courts in Northern Ireland, because we all know that juries can be nobbled, particularly when big-time dealers are on trial. Then there are often not proven or not guilty verdicts. It is almost impossible to prove that, but it happens. There are lawyers sitting in the chamber who know it happens.

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab): Will Mr Young accept that there is no evidence that any jury in this country has ever been nobbled? The comment that lawyers here know that to be true is not right. We do not know it to be true; we have no evidence whatsoever.

John Young: Mr Jackson cannot say the statement is untrue either, because we both have a problem: I cannot prove it and he cannot disprove it. I challenge any lawyer here to say otherwise. We can suspect but we may not be able to prove, on either side. Nevertheless, there is a very good case for not having juries.

Mr Raffan: Rather than this neanderthal approach, which is so typical of the extreme right-wing attitude of his party now, and rather than making silly personal attacks that are not worthy of the chamber, will Mr Young explain the appalling record on home affairs and law and order of his party in government—which was not so much a Greek tragedy as a Feydeau farce—and then, eating humble pie, tell us what he would do for the future?

John Young: I have no intention of eating humble pie. As a former Tory MP, Keith Raffan knows as well as I do that the Tories had considerable success in the past on this. He chose to leave our party—

Mr Raffan: I saw the light.

John Young: The lights were going out. I am speaking for people on the streets who have said such things to me time and again. Will life ever mean that in a life sentence? It does on occasion, yet the law could be reported for breaching the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 because, more often than not, a life sentence comes with a recommendation of a limited number of years.

Justice must be seen to be done: that is a hollow

phrase today when we do not often see it being done. I cannot find the words retribution or punishment anywhere in "Making it work together"—only the word rehabilitation. I agree with rehabilitation where it is humanly possible, but there must be retribution and punishment. That means that drug dealers, particularly the big-time ones, should be left only with what they are standing up in in court, rather than the miserly £30,000 that was levied against one convicted drug dealer.

Another problem is that, in the culture of certain communities, GBH is almost the equivalent of an OBE and a visit to the Barlinnie is like a visit to Buckingham Palace. Several years ago, a criminologist said on television that the middle-aged and elderly hark back to a golden age where there was virtually no crime. That is probably true of the harking back, but there has always been crime. That criminologist also said that there was more crime before 1880 than there is today. Most people feel, however, that there has been a change in society over the past 20 years. Drugs have played a large part in that.

We now have what I call the third zero generation. I am not being critical—any one of us could have landed in the zero generation depending on where we were born and if we did not have the benefits of education and employment. Most members of the zero generation are not criminals, but some are. They have time on their hands, as Tommy Sheridan I think once said, and many have contempt for society in general. The police, the community and government have a part to play but so have the procurators fiscal and the courts, who suffocate themselves with paper. They are often a weak link.

We should set up municipal courts, which again should be fast-track, to deal with certain motoring offences, littering, persistent truancy and the like. We should also think about something like the Peace Corps that could capture the imagination of youth.

Angus MacKay: I hesitate to intervene as to do so will prolong the contribution—[MEMBERS: "Prolong the agony."] To bring things back to the planet that the rest of us inhabit, will Mr Young explain why there is such a contrast between the current policy approach and that of the previous national Administration in its 18 years of government? Crime figures overall rose by 21 per cent between 1979 and 1997.

Will the member also clarify his comments on stripping drug dealers of their assets? He said they should be left with nothing but the clothes they are standing in if they are convicted of a criminal offence. Does that mean that he is, on behalf of his party, ruling out the Irish model of civil forfeiture where an individual can be prosecuted

under civil law without a conviction having taken place for a specific drugs offence?

John Young: The Irish method is very interesting and worthy of exploration. I was talking about very big-time drug dealers, not smaller drug dealers. Everything should be explored.

People find policemen on the beat comforting, but bear in mind that there are multi-storeys today and vast car parks and supermarkets and things have changed. Criminals are mobile today.

Mention was made of the children's panel system. I quote:

"In particular the children's panel system is a valuable forum for the young person who just strays off the straight and narrow and is often effective. However when it comes to the persistent offenders then it does not seem to work. The panel system has been in operation for 30 years and it is perhaps time to overhaul its purpose and aims. There are now many more young sophisticated and determined criminals around who need a different approach."

That quotation does not come from Tory central office but from the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents, from highly experienced police officers. The children's panel has a part to play but it must be looked at again.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Does the member accept that for serious crimes and for repeat offending there is provision already for young people under the age of 16 to be referred to the courts system? Does he agree also that the children's hearing was a radical measure and has been accepted worldwide as an innovative way of offering protection to young people, as well as dealing with offending behaviour?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Young and ask him to close on this point.

John Young: That provision applies only to indictable offences. I will now wind up.

A government's first and basic duty is to protect the people that it represents: it does not matter what the political complexion of that government is. Sometimes that has been forgotten. I feel—and I stress that this is a personal view—that the west, and I do not just mean this country, is losing the drugs war. We can ill afford to do that. We must examine new measures and new strategies that may not have been explored before. That does not mean asking for people to be executed or put in jail and the key thrown away, but we must use a number of different measures.

I thought that Phil Gallie and Johann Lamont in particular gave realistic speeches: she knows what she is talking about. I do not always agree with him but Tommy Sheridan knows what he is talking about, as do a number of other people in this chamber. We cannot go on in the same way

because we will lose out. We are coming to a new century and we should be prepared to take the bit between the teeth and take the necessary action.

11:22

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I welcome today's debate. People throughout Scotland will want to hear it because tackling crime is important to them.

Today, as well as discussing how we tackle crime, I want to highlight the work that is carried out by the voluntary sector in combating crime and its effects. Throughout Scotland, people are taking positive action to make their communities safe and to provide alternatives to the criminal cycle into which young people can so easily fall. To use a phrase that has been referred to often this morning, I believe that we must be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime.

Being tough on crime means that, as a Parliament, we must support tough measures to target drug dealers, whose evil trade blights our communities. People will not forgive us if we shy away from our responsibilities. I am thinking of people such as Phyllis Woodlock, a Lanarkshire woman, whose 13-year-old son died after taking an ecstasy tablet. She is right to demand that drug dealers face tough sentences and that the proceeds of their criminal activities be confiscated. That is why I welcome the Executive's plan to create a drugs enforcement agency by June 2000.

Being tough on the causes of crime means that we must support the numerous community and voluntary organisations that provide people of all ages with an alternative to criminal activities. I want young people to be given opportunities for personal and social development. Providing meaningful education and leisure opportunities for young people is the best way of ensuring that they become productive and active citizens. Organisations such as the Girls' Brigade, the Boys' Brigade, the scouts and youth football teams all complement the youth services that are provided by our councils. I believe that those organisations play a major role in developing social cohesion in our communities. A young person who is valued in a community is more likely to respect that community.

Voluntary organisations such as community credit unions provide people with a means to save and borrow, which can stave off the need to approach illegal money lenders whose exorbitant interest rates can often drive people in desperation to commit criminal acts.

Victim Support provides valuable services in Scotland. Last year, 1,400 volunteers provided practical and emotional support to 40,000 victims of crime. The voice of the victim must be heard. In

a recent criminal justice research report, two thirds of victims interviewed reported behavioural changes as a result of the criminal incident; they said, for example, that they were becoming more security conscious and more irritable and distrustful of others.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Karen Whitefield talks about victims of crime, but Labour has totally ignored them. Funding for Victim Support Scotland was slashed by £27,000 in 1998-99.

Karen Whitefield: This is an important debate. The Labour Administration, in partnership with the Liberal Democrats, will put the victim at the top of the agenda. Today, I am calling for action to support the victim. If Mr McGrigor listens to the rest of my speech, I hope that he will support what I am calling for.

Victim Support is active in reducing the fear of crime in our communities. Too often, some of our most vulnerable citizens have a heightened fear of crime. The provision of accurate figures on crime levels in their areas can alleviate unnecessary fear. England already has a victims charter and I call on the Scottish Executive to establish a victims charter for Scotland. That would enhance the rights of victims by clarifying what information and support they could expect to receive.

I also call on the Scottish Executive to expand the witness support services that were recently piloted in three areas. Other agencies, such as Rape Crisis and Scottish Women's Aid, also provide invaluable services and are illustrative of the important role that the voluntary sector can play in crime prevention and in dealing with the consequences of crime.

Before I sum up, I will mention briefly the role of closed-circuit television in combating crime. As some members will be aware, Airdrie town centre hosted one of the two pilot studies that were established to examine the impact of CCTV. The evaluation proved that CCTV has an important role to play in tackling crime: 21 per cent fewer offences were recorded in the 24 months following installation; the police cleared up 16 per cent more crime during that period; and, contrary to the arguments of opponents of CCTV, there was no evidence that crimes were displaced to outlying areas.

I do not believe that the police or the Scottish Executive or communities can alone tackle the problem of crime. A partnership is required, in which criminals are targeted, in which efforts that direct people away from crime are supported and developed, and in which increased employment and education opportunities complement enhanced police measures. Community and voluntary organisations throughout Scotland are

struggling against crime and its effects. We must support them in that struggle—together, we can make a difference.

11:28

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I am grateful to you, Presiding Officer, for calling me to speak in what is one of the more important debates that has taken place in this Parliament.

There is no doubt at all that the ability of people to feel safe in their homes and to walk the streets of their local communities without the fear of being attacked is fundamental to their quality of life. It is for that reason that I broadly support the community-based approach that the Government is taking and welcome the importance that it is placing on this issue.

As the minister acknowledged, even the quickest of glances at the statistics shows that there is no room for complacency. During 1998, recorded crime increased by an extremely concerning 7 per cent for drug-related crime and by 3 per cent for crimes of dishonesty—the two statistics are not unrelated. Although the latter represents a drop of 2 per cent since 1997, more than 76,000 crimes of vandalism were committed in 1998. Such crimes blight the lives of many people in Scotland, especially in urban areas. The initiatives that the Government has announced in the guidance paper and in the minister's remarks this morning are to be welcomed, but they must be followed through into communities and backed up with resources.

I do not want to labour my criticism, but it is worth noting that the minister did not centrally address the issue of resources—perhaps he will return to that when he sums up. The provision of resources at community level is crucial in ensuring that the efforts of local communities to combat crime are reinforced.

Closed-circuit television has been mentioned. I pay tribute to many local agencies in Glasgow, particularly housing associations, which have led the way in installing CCTV cameras with the enthusiastic support of local people. Most local people welcome the installation of CCTV cameras and, as my colleague Ms Cunningham said, demand is on the increase. However, there is some frustration with the associated problems, especially the lack of resources to ensure that the cameras are monitored and operational at all times and that there is consistency in the monitoring of the camera output.

We must also consider the impact of installing CCTV cameras in one street on neighbouring streets that do not have them. Since being elected, I have been struck by the number of people who live in areas without CCTV cameras

and feel that they are bearing the brunt of crime that has been relocated from areas with cameras. The Executive and other agencies must give serious consideration to that when they make decisions about the installation of cameras.

Ms Cunningham mentioned bobbies on the beat and I have listened with interest to members' comments about the police. We must face the reality that, in many parts of Scotland—especially in Glasgow, the area that I know best—police presence in some communities is minimal, which leads to diminished public confidence. That is not a criticism of the police, who do a good job in difficult circumstances. We must ensure that the police presence on the streets is increased. To reiterate a point that was made earlier, we must ensure that the perceived success of local partnerships does not have an impact on the police presence.

To his credit, the minister acknowledged the link between poverty and crime. As Ms Cunningham said, we must recognise that the best way of combating crime is to provide people with jobs, real incomes, better educational opportunities and the feeling that they have a stake in the communities in which they live.

Young people commit much of the crime—especially in parts of Glasgow—that blights the lives of so many people. We must recognise that decisions taken by local authorities in recent years have exacerbated that problem. Tommy mentioned the situation in Pollok and I will give another example. Pollokshaws—in the Govan constituency—has a high incidence of youth crime and youth offences, but the one local facility, the local sports centre, is due to be closed by the local authority. I would like the minister to give an assurance that the Executive is considering how we can ensure that young people are given a constructive alternative to crime and offences.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mr Raffan.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): On a point of order. When Sir David Steel opened the debate, he said that those who were not here while the minister was making the statement would not be called in the debate. Now Mr Raffan has been called. Will you please give clarification?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not think that Sir David said that they would not be called; he said that their absence would be taken into consideration. A number of members, who were not here for the minister's speech or for other parts of the debate, have spoken. We take that into consideration, but it does not rule someone out.

Phil Gallie: Can I perhaps help you, Presiding Officer? My understanding was that Sir David said that members who spoke in the debate should be

here when the minister summed up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, Sir David was making the point that members who wish to participate should be here for the debate. As I explained, he was not excluding members; he was bringing it to their attention that they should show the courtesy of being in the chamber to hear what was being said.

11:35

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Duncan McNeil made a fair point. I was going to start by apologising to the chamber and the minister for not being here at the beginning of the debate. I apologise for that unintentional discourtesy. I was in the middle of preparing a speech for this afternoon's voluntary sector debate and I did not realise—until I saw and heard the minister on the monitor—that he was going to talk so much about drugs issues. That is why I want to speak in this debate. I will be brief but, as my party's drugs spokesman, I want to comment on what he said.

Military terminology has now become customary in the debate about tackling drug misuse, but talk about wars on drugs, fighting battles and so on is not helpful; it does not make for an intelligent and thoughtful approach to this serious, global problem, which is spreading throughout the land. There are drugs problems in Caithness, in the small fishing villages around the Broch, as Fraserburgh is known. When I was a parliamentary candidate there 25 years ago, the main problem was alcohol; now it is pure heroin.

If we talk about a war, we may have to acknowledge that we may lose it. That is how serious the situation is. We must take an intelligent and thoughtful approach to tackling drug misuse. I have differences with the UK Government on its strategy. The Government is concentrating on cutting supply—I accept that that is essential—but it is not doing enough to cut demand. Three quarters of the £1.4 billion that is spent on tackling drug misuse in the UK is spent on detection, on the courts and so on and only a quarter is spent on treatment, rehabilitation and education.

It is always easy to advocate increased public spending and I am not saying that less should be spent on cutting supply, but we must spend a lot more on cutting demand. We must spend more on treatment and rehabilitation. It is a scandal that, in Scotland, we have only 120 residential beds for drug addicts. In the Fife part of my regional constituency, there are at least 5,000 drug addicts.

I am not soft on drugs. When I was in the House of Commons, after being lucky enough to secure a high place on the private members ballot, I took through the Controlled Drugs (Penalties) Act 1985.

I did that with all-party support, including the support of Scottish nationalists—it was Margaret Ewing, I think—and Welsh nationalist Dafydd Wigley. I had the support of the Labour party through Frank Field and other members of the Tory party—I was a Tory then.

Ms Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): You are better now.

Mr Raffan: At least I am honest about my dubious past. With the support of every party in the House of Commons, the act increased the maximum sentence for trafficking in class A drugs from 14 years to life. That was important. I played a lesser part in passing the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986, which deals with the law and order side of this matter.

In policy and thinking, I hope that I have developed from there. Those were important measures, but we must now emphasise the treatment and rehabilitation side. My party has advocated a royal commission on drugs. I would prefer it to be a royal commission on addiction, for precisely the reasons that have been stated. We cannot consider drugs in isolation and we must take into account the so-called gateway drugs—in Scotland, alcohol and cannabis and marijuana are among the leading ones.

I have serious reservations about the decriminalisation of cannabis and marijuana. Some members will probably find that disappointing, but I will explain my position. Treatment centres in the UK have, in the past three years, recorded a significant increase in the number of young people going in for treatment because of dependence on cannabis and marijuana. They are admitting themselves or being admitted by their parents, who are worried that they will go on to take harder drugs. We must take note of that.

I have attended open meetings of Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous and have huge respect for what those fellowships do to help addicts and alcoholics into recovery. They do not have a public profile and it is not for me to give them that or to say what their views are. However, none of the addicts in recovery to whom I have spoken favoured the decriminalisation of cannabis and marijuana. They felt that they had been brought up in a drugs culture. They started to use alcohol at a young age, went on to cannabis and marijuana and then graduated—the terminology is unfortunate—to harder drugs.

Prisons have been mentioned. Phil is extraordinarily naive if he thinks that we can stop drugs getting into prisons. I was at Saughton recently and at Craiginches relatively recently, where I spoke to the governors, who are very able and enlightened men. They said that if we

introduced closed visits there would be a riot—it is as simple as that. There are closed-visits facilities for people who are caught passing drugs—which is very difficult to stop—but at Craiginches the ordinary visitors facilities are intolerably cramped.

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way?

Mr Raffan: I want to finish making this point. We need new visitors facilities at Craiginches, because the current facilities make it difficult for the prison to keep drugs out. The governor estimates that 70 per cent of the people in the prison are there for drugs-related offences.

Phil Gallie: I am not naive enough to suspect that overnight we could stop drugs getting into prisons. However, at the moment there is an unacceptable level of drug taking in prison. We must move to counter that.

Mr Raffan: That is a commendable ambition. However, when Mr McLeish had responsibility for this issue as a member of the UK Government, he brought sniffer dogs into prisons. At Saughton, the deputy governor informed me that dogs had been in the previous day but had not found anything. An hour later, a prison officer found a lump of cannabis wrapped in plastic and covered with Bovril. The prisoners are ahead of us and ahead of the dogs.

We must take a more intelligent approach. I respect the drugs-free zones in prisons, but the problem is that people who are coming off drugs in prisons—often by going cold turkey, and in some cases of heroin addiction without being put on methadone and having the amounts reduced gradually—are not getting counselling. The extent to which counselling is offered and to which the fellowships are admitted varies greatly from prison to prison. Prison and institutional visits are one of the valuable things that Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous do. They make it possible to hold the sort of meetings that take place so successfully the length and breadth of this country to help people in recovery.

As the governor of Saughton also told me, it is important that we stop seeing prisons in isolation. When people leave—this relates to all prisoners, not just addicts—there should be much more aftercare provided by local social services. That would give people the support and back-up that they need to keep them in recovery—to keep them clean and sober—so that they do not relapse.

There is a huge amount to be done to encourage rehabilitation and not nearly enough is being done in our prisons. This is not a soft approach—it is an intelligent one. We should regard the money that is put into rehabilitating people and ensuring that they do not become recidivists not as public spending, but as public investment. We will be returning law-breaking

addicts to society as employed and taxpaying members of the community, rather than as a drain on its resources.

Not having been here for the first speech of the debate, I do not want to go on too long. However, I would like to comment on the recent widely reported remarks of the deputy chief constable of Lothian and Borders Police. I am worried by talk of a drugs tsar, which usually means a senior police officer and, with all respect to the minister, who is clearly an able man, it sends out the wrong signal to have as the chairman of the ministerial committee on drug misuse the Deputy Minister for Justice. The emphasis should be more on treatment, rehabilitation and education. The minister takes a hardline approach to drug-trafficking, as he must—it is an evil trade. However, we must also consider the other side of the issue: it is important to cut demand.

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

Mr Raffan: I am about to.

The deputy chief constable said that voluntary agencies working in this field had to be streamlined. That was reported as meaning that they should be culled, which would be a disaster. We need better co-ordination of the voluntary agencies—I may have more to say about that this afternoon—but we should not lose people who have built up a huge amount of expertise and experience in the front line of tackling drug misuse. There is no doubt that we have a drugs crisis in this country, but that crisis would be infinitely worse but for the excellent work of the voluntary agencies. It is important that they can depend on receiving stable financial support from the Scottish Executive.

11:46

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

As was said earlier, many of those who feel most unsafe live in our most deprived communities. The problems that they face are well known: people are unable to leave their homes without having someone to house-sit to prevent a break-in and the theft of their possessions; there is widespread vandalism; there is a fear of young people hanging about; and there is the scourge of drugs and drugs-related crime.

I am not sure that the audits, focus groups, surveys, citizens panels and people's juries that are referred to in the rather glossy report will tell us anything that communities do not already know. A couple of weeks ago, I had a meeting with the Finmill community safety panel in Dundee, which was very clear about its safety concerns and priorities. I would be more than happy to pass them on to the minister, so that we can bypass the

inquiry phase and get on with action to solve the problems.

The report is inoffensive and contains nothing with which I would disagree. However, as Christine said, it is not the easiest document to read. I found more than 150 references to partnership and more than 50 references to strategy, but zero references to new money. Will the minister tell us how much new money will be available to tackle the problems? He announced £3 million to support communities in dealing with safety problems. That money is welcome, but it could be spent in one partnership area. If we ask, ask, ask and do not deliver, we will do more damage.

The document states that local authorities will be key players in the partnerships. However, they have seen their budgets cut by £1.3 billion in real terms over the first three years of this Government, which has meant that youth facilities have had to close or reduce their service. That is not really joined-up thinking, is it? Why do we not provide the youth facilities that would stop young people hanging around the streets and reduce youth-related crime? That is joined-up thinking. Will the minister tell us what new resources will go into developing youth provision?

Young people are themselves trying to do things to improve the communities in which they live. I would like to pay tribute to the Braeview Academy community safety panel, which had its first official meeting yesterday. It involves young people identifying their priorities and doing something to achieve them. Their question was: "Where are the resources to develop youth facilities in our area?" I ask the minister the same question, because this is all about resources.

The report says that the action plans that are to be drawn up put the onus on individual agencies to

"take ownership of those parts of the action plan which most relate to their core activities".

Will the minister clarify whether that is to be achieved within existing resources? If that is the case, how will it be done?

The police play a key role in community safety, yet police force numbers—and I am not talking about civilian staff—have decreased during the past two years. The police have a role to play in making communities feel safer, but that requires additional police presence. Will the minister say whether police resources will be made available in addition to the 200 police officers who will be ring-fenced for work on the drugs problem?

The report is inoffensive, if a little vague. However, we should not raise expectations in our communities if we cannot deliver. Adequate

resources must be made available and I have yet to hear that that will be the case.

11:51

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab):

Most people believe in crime prevention. The only people I have met who do not are criminals and my bank manager.

The trouble is that there are no easy fixes and no easy answers—Johann Lamont is right about that—and we disagree on how to tackle the problem. One approach, which I detected in the speeches by Phil Gallie and John Young, is to blame the courts for being too soft and demand that more people be locked up, and locked up for longer.

I believe in locking people up and that retribution is important for society. However, it is no use for the prevention of crime. The Home Office commissioned studies for the previous Government, which made it clear that detention is of minimal relevance to crime prevention. It wastes a lot of money and does not cut crime. If Phil does not believe that, he should consider the United States of America, where incredible numbers of people are locked up with no effect on the crime rate.

Phil Gallie: Is it not the case that many of the individuals who go through our courts have been released from prison on parole and committed a crime as soon as they got out? Such people clog up the courts and are simply recycled through our prisons.

Gordon Jackson: That suggests that people who go into prison come out and reoffend. It does not suggest that putting people into custody does much good.

Detention is also expensive. The statistics that were produced by the previous Government showed that, in matters of crime prevention, £1 spent on non-custodial methods equals £7 spent on custody.

The other method of crime prevention is giving more resources to the police. We are all in favour of that. I welcome the establishment of the drugs enforcement agency and I am in favour of having more police officers in the street.

The trouble with those strategies is that they are born out of despair. In the past, the attitude has been that people will always commit crime, and the only thing that we can do is catch them doing it and lock them up. I am glad that we are to move away from that. Crime reduction is possible. I am a great supporter of CCTV, although I was sceptical at the beginning. I am conscious of the human rights issues, but I am convinced that it works and will support any initiative to give it more resources.

CCTV also works in another way. It gives people confidence and a sense of safety. Elderly people ask me whether their area can be given CCTV—not simply to catch criminals, but to give them a sense of safety, which is important.

The most important issue in the debate—and it is why I reject Phil's amendment—is the community aspect. The amendment goes away from that. I welcome the communities that care initiative. The minister has not had time to talk about the initiative, but it is important. It is sophisticated; it is not a slogan for political consumption. It identifies the risk areas in a community and targets them. The strategy has worked elsewhere, particularly in north America. It is an important step forward, but—and I always have a little complaint—we need to do more.

Most crime is committed by young men, and we need to deal with that. Yesterday, I read some statistics for people who are sent to prison for life for homicide. The peak age is 18. The biggest group is the 15 to 18-year-old bracket, and I have no doubt that that is the biggest group for all offending. We need to go into schools and set up and resource proper educational programmes that deal with the community aspects of crime prevention.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I agree with Gordon Jackson's emphasis on community service. I have a report from the social work committee of Highland Council, which says that the grant for criminal justice services will not meet the needs that councils have identified. Highland Council and others are having to cut community services at weekends and in the evenings. Does Gordon Jackson agree that that is a matter for concern?

Gordon Jackson: I do not know the details of what the member is saying, but I agree that such services should be better resourced.

We need to go into schools properly. The community bobby who has an hour with a class once a month is no longer adequate—and I mean such police officers no disrespect. In particular, we need to deal with young men who have offended. We need to go to the institutions where we lock up young people and tackle the business of rehabilitation. We should not think of rehabilitation as a soft option; it is in nobody's interest if an offender reoffends.

I accept that the problem must be seen in the context of society as a whole; we should talk about poor housing, poor health and a lack of education. As Roseanna Cunningham said, until we tackle those issues, our crime prevention strategies will not meet with success.

Robin Harper: I am sure that Gordon Jackson will agree with this point, but I would like to

mention it again with reference to Phil Gallie's earlier remarks. The problem with the children's panel system is the lack of resources to deal with persistent offenders.

Gordon Jackson: I agree. I would like to extend the age limit to 18, for people being brought before a children's panel. I do not think that every young offender should go before a children's panel, but it should be a discretionary option.

Community initiatives such as the ones that I mentioned cost money. That worries me, because in the past money spent on such initiatives has not always been the most popular political option. People have spoken about tabloid politics—sometimes spending money on certain things seems to have such popularity. The community initiatives that the minister is suggesting are valuable but, like a lot of valuable things, they are expensive. However, I welcome them and hope that there will be the political will and the real resources to put them into practice. That is very much what we need.

12:00

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Gordon Jackson is right that young people between 15 and 18 are at most risk, either of being assaulted—in the case of severe crime—or of being charged with a severe crime.

I wish to raise a problem with the minister that has not been touched upon today—Scottish citizens who murder overseas. When someone is convicted of murder in Scotland, they will find on their release—if they are released—that they are subject to release on licence. However, a person who murders overseas—for example, in Canada—can be returned here once they have served their sentence and will not be subject to any supervisory requirements.

The police brought it to my knowledge that someone was returned to this country after committing a murder, who had spent only the first three years of his life here. He was not subject to any supervisory requirements. Perhaps he cannot give an answer today, but I ask the minister to look at that problem and to suggest proposals for dealing with it.

Euan Robson supported community policing—that is wholly admirable—and witness protection, which is very necessary. Of course the police must have the necessary resources. I am glad to see that police numbers will increase, but they have decreased by 266; whatever increases there have been in administrative support, that needs to be addressed.

There have been many significant speeches this morning on the issue of drugs, and support for a

comprehensive approach. I agree with Keith Raffan about cannabis; it is a matter of particular debate. I wrote to Sam Galbraith about it because I believe that it has harmful medical effects. He confirmed in a letter dated 27 May that

"there are potential risks associated with the use of cannabis. These include, in the short term, impairment of concentration, memory loss and manual dexterity and in the long term, respiratory diseases such as bronchitis and lung cancer."

He continued:

"We have no intention of legalising or decriminalising the drug. This would send the wrong messages to society . . . at a time when we are encouraging people not to smoke and not to drink excessive amounts of alcohol, because of the harmful effects, it would be totally inconsistent to legalise cannabis."

It is my understanding that the minister touched on that this morning and that that is his position. I should be glad if he could confirm that his position remains strong on that issue.

It would help if the minister could say what is done with drug dealers' assets that are confiscated by the police and whether the value of those assets is ploughed back into police funds. What support is he giving to Scotland Against Drugs?

Karen Whitefield was right to call for a victims charter—more action is necessary on behalf of victims. It is important that when they go to court, there should be a victim-friendly atmosphere. That is why a video link is desirable in many cases involving serious violence to women. Victims should be better informed—I understand that measures are in place to take that forward—and when cases do not proceed, they should be told why.

Victims should also be told whether an assailant who perpetrated a violent attack on them is about to be released. A former constituent of mine, who was badly damaged in an acid attack, felt strongly that the incident might not have happened if she had been properly informed.

Those are not abstract, theoretical matters—they matter to those involved. I hope that stronger support will be given to Victim Support Scotland.

The case for CCTV—as has been said by many members—is overwhelming. It has been very effective, with a reduction in the commission of crime and a greater clear-up rate. Computerised fingerprinting and the use of high technology and DNA are also important.

I request the minister to continue to support the work of Apex Trust Scotland. If prisoners go into a job when they come out of prison, it benefits the whole community. Apex is able to facilitate that and has had a remarkable success rate. Will the minister support courses in prison? Whether they

are anger management courses, modules or degrees, they all play their part in the overall spectrum.

What is important about crime prevention is the effective and successful protection of the community. I hope that the minister will address the problem of those who murder abroad being returned to Scotland without any supervisory requirements.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Michael Matheson to wind up for the Scottish National party.

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
rose—

Tommy Sheridan: On a point of order. I have to complain that I have sat here since 9.30 am, when the Labour benches were a lot emptier. I have had my button on since then, as I wanted to make a speech. I wanted to make an important point about a number of recent murders in my area and to raise that matter with the minister, but you are treating me rather unfairly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is no guarantee that any member will be able to speak on a particular issue. I recognise that Mr Sheridan has had his button on for some time, but so have many other members who wish to speak. I apologise if he cannot raise his points, but I am sure that the minister will take them up for him in another way.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I am not a known supporter of Tommy on many matters, but he has been here all morning and others who arrived late have been allowed to speak. That is an issue which needs to be resolved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sure that we can refer that to the Procedures Committee.

12:07

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am guilty of having played no part in stopping Tommy making a speech, although I recognise that some members' speeches went on for some time.

Phil Gallie: Presiding Officer, is it possible that we can move to extend this morning's proceedings to allow one or two other colleagues to speak in the debate? If so, I would be prepared to move such a motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, Mr Gallie. To accommodate everyone who wishes to speak, we would have to extend this part of the meeting almost into this afternoon's time. It is not possible, so we will move on to Mr Matheson, who had begun to speak.

Michael Matheson: Third time lucky.

In considering today's debate, and having seen the minister's motion, I thought that there would be cross-party support, particularly in relation to the guidance document. However, I was not prepared for the Conservative approach to crime prevention of, "Shoot them and hing them." If there is anything that the minister should take from the debate, it is that no party has a monopoly of ideas on how we should tackle crime and remove it from the streets of Scotland.

Several members highlighted a variety of successful crime prevention schemes that are either running in their own areas at present or have done in the past. The issue of mobile police stations has been highlighted—they were a success for the police in the Dumfries and Galloway area. We have heard about the success of Fife Council's domestic violence programme. Karen Whitefield referred to credit unions and the impact that they could have on reducing crime on our streets. There are many good ideas, which should be promoted.

One of the key features of the guidance document is that it focuses on finding local solutions to local problems and ensuring that local communities are consulted in the process of establishing strategies. I stress to the minister that it is essential that any form of consultation with local communities is worth while and effective.

We all recognise that, where possible, local communities should be empowered to tackle their own problems. However, there can be nothing more demoralising for those in a local community who go through a consultation process than to feel at the end of it that their views have not been listened to or acted upon. I stress that the minister should ensure that the strategies that are implemented lead to genuine consultation—I am conscious that, for a variety of reasons, that word has been abused.

Several colleagues mentioned the fact that the concept of community safety partnerships is not new. Yesterday I was having a chat with a gentleman from Victim Support in Lanarkshire, who told me that he was involved in a community safety strategy in Kilmarnock back in 1975.

As was said, if Victim Support is to have a key role in the strategy, its funding must be addressed. Karen Whitefield highlighted the issue of a victims charter. Members should know that I lodged a motion for a members' business debate on Victim Support and the provision of a victims charter. I hope that Karen and other colleagues who support that will sign the motion in the chamber office.

The post of local authority liaison officer, which is covered by the guidance document, is not new. To my knowledge, the first local authority liaison

officer was in place almost eight years ago in Falkirk as part of Central Scotland police. It is essential to recognise that much work has been done in the past by a variety of organisations, both statutory and voluntary. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. In effect, the document formalises that process, rather than creating a new one.

I hope that the minister will recognise that to talk about preventing crime is insufficient. To prevent crime, we must look beyond that, at the causes of crime, which, as the minister said, are often based in social disadvantage—unemployment, poverty and a feeling of hopelessness. That is why we must recognise that the guidance document must work in partnership with social inclusion strategies. How will the minister ensure that that will be done in the implementation of the crime prevention strategy?

I want to highlight several points that have been raised. What additional resources will be provided to ensure that the strategy is put in place and will have the funding that it requires?

There is concern about the use of CCTV and the need for regulation. Although we recognise the benefits of CCTV, there are concerns about the present code of practice and about whether the code is being adhered to. I would welcome the minister's assurance that that will continue to be monitored—not with a CCTV camera—so that public confidence in CCTV is maintained.

I return to Roseanna Cunningham's point about the need to monitor the community partnership strategy effectively, to ensure that it works and that failings are addressed early on. It will have been wasteful for us to have a three-hour debate to discuss the document if people end up still living in fear because of crime in their neighbourhood. Will the minister ensure that there is an adequate system to monitor the strategy's effectiveness and that any failings are addressed early on?

12:14

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): First, I apologise to the minister for being late for this debate. I was delayed by two fender-bender episodes on the M8 this morning. No one was injured, I am happy to say.

A number of issues have cropped up this morning. I want to dispel the idea that we are the hang 'em and flog 'em brigade. I know that we have had that tendency in the past. *[Interruption.]* There was no mention of hanging, flogging or shooting, Roseanna. We are the caring Conservative party now. Many of us agree about the strategies to solve—Keith Raffan asked for a change in terminology—what could be called the drugs dilemma instead of the drugs war. There is

a serious issue here. It behoves us all to take on board that, although we disagree in certain areas, many of us agree on a great number of aspects of the problem. It is a health, education and law and order matter.

Karen Whitefield called for support for the victims charter and for Victim Support. It is incontrovertible that £27,000 has been knocked off the funding for Victim Support. I support Karen's call, and hope that the minister will respond to it.

I was appalled last night to hear the comments of Richard Holloway. I hope that others will join me in condemning them. I know that the Administration takes this very seriously.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member give way?

Mrs McIntosh: I am sorry. I cannot give way as I only have a few moments, but I promise that I will give way to Tommy Sheridan in the future.

I hope that others will share my condemnation of the bishop for saying such an insensitive thing about using a joint.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Sheridan, the member has already said that she does not wish to give way.

Tommy Sheridan: Mrs McIntosh was attacking an alleged comment. She was not there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Sheridan, please sit down.

Mrs McIntosh: I admit that I was not there. If I had been there, I would have condemned him roundly. It was an incredibly insensitive thing to say, particularly given where he was.

Tommy Sheridan: Three different newspapers have said three different things.

Mrs McIntosh: The comment was made and reported.

On the drug enforcement agency, we have sought clarification on what the minister's measures are. The funding is vital. We do not want officers to be taken away from other parts of the police service. The minister's comments about the funding are welcome. When he gets the arithmetic done, I will be glad to hear what he has to say.

CCTV has been mentioned many times. I know that there are a number of fans within the chamber. I have seen what happens in my area. CCTV frees up police time and saves the police running around looking for the wrong guy. When a crime is witnessed on CCTV the instruction can be immediate, and the description is accurate and can be checked as soon as the police catch a person. The police can track where a person is

going. I am a big fan of CCTV.

There are various methods of getting police around, such as having bobbies on the beat or using bicycles. I have even seen a policeman on a bicycle in East Kilbride—not much good for car crime and catching speeders. We appreciate that there are changes to be made in the way in which we police. It is a technological job now. The police have information available to them in their cars for tracking and for apprehending. We have to move with the times and be as well equipped as the bad guys are.

Children's panels were mentioned. There have been a number of calls on radio for recruitment to children's panels. I notice that men are being sought. Why is that? Is it because it is women who dish out admonitions and instructions on behaviour? I appeal to men to volunteer for the children's panels. Do not leave it up to women alone.

I apologise for the time that I have taken. Members will know that there has been some confusion about the speaking order.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call on Angus MacKay to wind up the debate.

Tommy Sheridan: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can I conclude from the fact that you are allowing Angus to follow that you have changed the standing orders? The business bulletin clearly states that Tom McCabe would speak "no later than 12.20". It is now 12.20. Does that mean that you are prepared to extend the debate, but only for certain members?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Sheridan, I have already explained that there is no guarantee for any member to speak in a debate. We try to accommodate as many members as we can. I will move on so that we can bring the debate to a conclusion.

12:21

Angus MacKay: Although Lyndsay has attempted to pour some consensual water on to the Conservative debate, she might have some difficulty controlling the dangerous dogs that sit beside and behind her. Before she was in the chamber they intervened in a considerably less consensual manner.

All members will be impressed and pleased by the way in which the debate has been conducted. Broadly speaking, we have had a degree of consensus about community safety and how to improve it. However, I must exclude most of the comments from the Conservative party from that statement. Mr Matheson said that no party had a monopoly on the issues. As far as I am concerned, the Conservatives have not even reached the Old

Kent Road, let alone anywhere else. I hope that the quality of Tory speeches on the subject will improve in future.

I also hope that members will forgive me for not addressing every point that was raised. I am happy to answer in writing any questions that have not been addressed. Before returning to some of the specific matters raised in the debate, I want to mention some of the general themes that inform the debate.

The Scottish Executive recognises the high-risk factors that inevitably lead to delinquency and escalating tariffs of crime. Members have touched on those risks—poverty, homelessness, unemployment, poor health, low educational achievement and teenage pregnancy—in the course of the debate. The transition from childhood to adolescence is difficult enough, but when it involves a mix of those additional factors, the risk consequences become extremely high, both for young people and their communities. The Executive accepts responsibility for trying to minimise those risk factors.

I want to talk about the establishment of social inclusion partnerships, because they are central to the way in which we will address some of the problems that have been discussed. They also address questions in relation to funding. SIPs are a good example of the way in which we want to take the agenda forward. The partnerships are set up to get the best out of existing initiatives as well as to support additional and innovative activities, such as improving access to training, employment and education, improving child care provision, people's health and overall quality of life. Those strategies are based on information about the priorities and concerns of local residents, and I am particularly pleased to see that many of the social inclusion partnerships support the local community safety initiatives.

To support the work of the SIPs, we are making available £137 million over three years from the new social inclusion partnership fund. That is an example of the kind of co-ordination that I was talking about earlier. That addresses some of the questions about whether funding will be made available, directly or indirectly, to support the work of community safety partnerships and attendant issues. That money is in addition to the £3 million for closed-circuit television and community safety, the £1 million invested in the drug action teams across Scotland and the £300,000 for research.

My colleague Tom McCabe informs me that there has been £3.5 million of expenditure in South Lanarkshire, particularly on new youth facilities—an issue that was raised a few times by the SNP. Young people, who identified the need for the facilities and what kinds would work, designed those facilities. Much of that expenditure

will impact on Hamilton, when that work comes fully on line.

We have also invested £270,000 in the communities care project that Mr Jackson mentioned. Those are substantial innovative intervention projects that consider in great detail the ways in which we can tackle the problems of crime and crime prevention. They are not cheap options, but they are very effective and have a high preventive function. I hope that demonstrates that there is a substantial cash investment, through different avenues, in our policy on crime prevention.

At the core of the debate is the need to empower communities, community leaders and individual residents and to inform them about the way in which their community functions, the resources that are used and the way in which statutory organisations bring policy and practice to bear on those communities. We must ensure that individuals feel that it is safe and meaningful to be involved in their communities.

Too often, in communities that are heavily affected by high levels of drug use and drug dealing for example, it is very difficult for people to be brave and to stand up and be counted. In those circumstances, it is hard for people to speak out about what action should be taken to keep drugs off the streets, to say what must be done to ensure that rehabilitation projects and preventive education work. It is difficult for those people to say how the local community can work with law enforcement agencies and public sector agencies to ensure that the community is consulted and able to bring pressure to bear on the people in its own streets, so that they can work in the interests of the community rather than living in the shadow of the drug dealers.

What I found most depressing about the comments from the Conservatives is that they were big on high-profile issues and short on the details of community safety and crime prevention. They were woefully short on some of the long-term issues about social inclusion and regeneration.

The Conservatives made two points in particular on which I would like to comment. Between the end of the previous Tory Government and the present day, grant-aided expenditure for police forces has risen by 6.35 per cent in real terms. That is a fact; nobody can say that we are not putting additional resources into law enforcement. I also want to re-emphasise that, as Michael Matheson says, nobody has a monopoly on the issue of crime, particularly not the Conservatives. They talked tough on law and order, but there was a 21 per cent increase in crimes committed from 1979 to 1997.

Let us leave law enforcement and turn to the

more practical—

Phil Gallie: Does not the minister agree that, in the final years of the Conservative Administration, between 1991 and 1997, the crime figures plummeted? The Labour party has managed to reverse that trend.

Angus MacKay: The point that I am making is that the Conservatives had 18 years of government in which to bring to bear the full panoply of all the agencies, budgets and policy instruments to tackle the crime that is rooted in our communities, from law enforcement to regeneration. Despite having a generation of government and investment, the Conservatives failed; they do not hold a moral position from which to lecture any other party about the way in which we protect our communities from crime.

I will now turn to the constructive points that were made by SNP members. I welcomed Christine Grahame's comments, although I was rather concerned on her behalf because I read an article written in response to the voice of the new intellectual leadership of the SNP, Mr Andrew Wilson, and his comments on being British. The commentator said:

"The trouble is, much of what is being offered sounds as if it has fallen off the back of a new Labour think-tank."

Having heard the terms social inclusion and holistic, I was concerned that Christine might have been underneath the think-tank when it fell over. I was somewhat distressed. I welcome the broad consensus on the issue. The SNP made some valuable contributions to the discussion.

I am very happy to answer in writing questions about further details on community safety partnerships that I did not manage to address in today's debate. Audits have been carried out of the 32 community safety partnerships, and we are in discussion with the Accounts Commission and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary about the way in which we can establish broad monitoring mechanisms to ensure that those partnerships are effective and that best practice is replicated. I hope that that answer and others in writing will allay any fears on that front.

Rural policing is broadly an operational matter for the police forces and the chief constables. However, in Fife, for example, a number of mobile CCTV systems are available. Such mobile systems are an example of the way in which CCTV can be deployed effectively in non-urban, rural and remote parts of Scotland, where particular problems can arise that are difficult to deal with. CCTV is also effective in dealing with problems in urban Scotland: vandalism in school playgrounds, drug dealing in particular streets and areas, carjacking, house-breaking and what not.

Unfortunately, there is a large number of issues that I will not have time to talk about. I will wind up by saying that I think that it would be welcome, at a later date, to have a further and wider debate specifically on the important subject of drugs. This Administration is committed to enforcement—no one could imagine that that is not the case. We are also committed to prevention and rehabilitation. There are short-term, medium-term and long-term approaches.

In the short term, the drug enforcement agency will yield important results in interdicting the supply of drugs to our communities. In the medium term, we have to tackle the problem of demand: that will involve preventive and informative education on the use and misuse of drugs. In the long term—and I am glad that 99 per cent of the members in this chamber agree with this—the solution to the drugs problem and the wider crime problem will involve social inclusion and regeneration. That means delivering on the new deal, delivering on social inclusion partnerships, delivering on regeneration of all our communities, and especially of the peripheral housing estates, and ensuring that the education system works for all people in all communities in Scotland.

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson): The next item is the business motion, S1M-167.

12:32

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): As is normal, the motion sets out the business for next week and the provisional business for the following week.

On the afternoon of Wednesday 29 September, it is proposed that there will be a debate on an Executive motion on manufacturing and industrial strategy for Scotland. That will be followed by any motions put forward by the Parliamentary Bureau in respect of Scottish statutory instruments—which will be taken without debate—and by any procedural motions to be considered by the Parliament. Decision time will take place at 5 pm. After decision time, there will be a members' business debate on motion S1M-153, in the name of Mr Donald Gorrie, on the involvement of football clubs in local communities.

Business on Thursday 30 September will begin at 9.30 am with a debate on a non-Executive motion from the Scottish National party on education. On conclusion of the debate, I will move a further business motion. The afternoon will start as usual with question time at 2.30 pm, and at 3.15 pm there will be a debate on stage 1 of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill and the financial resolution that is required to accompany the bill. That will be followed by any motions put forward by the Parliamentary Bureau on SSIs, to be taken without debate. Decision time will take place at 5 pm, to be followed by a members' business debate on motion S1M-140, in the name of Mr Fergus Ewing, on the upgrading of the Mallaig road.

As I said, the business for the following week is provisional. On Wednesday 6 October, the first item of business at 2.30 pm will be a debate on an Executive motion on a subject yet to be announced. Decision time will take place at 5 pm. After decision time, there will be a members' business debate. The motion for that has yet to be selected.

On Thursday 7 October at 9.30 am, the first item of business will be a ministerial statement and debate on the Executive's expenditure plans. Immediately before lunch, I will move a business motion on future business. The afternoon will begin with question time at 2.30 pm. That will be followed by Executive business on a subject yet to be announced.

On both days of that week, provision will be

made to enable Parliament to consider any motions put forward by the Parliamentary Bureau in respect of SSIs—which will be taken without debate—and by any other procedural motions required to be considered by the Parliament. Decision time on 7 October will take place at 5 pm, and will be followed by a members' business debate on a motion that has not yet been selected.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 29 September 1999

2.30 pm Debate on an Executive Motion on a Manufacturing and Industrial Strategy for Scotland

followed by 5.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 September 1999

9.30 am Non-Executive Business: Debate on a Motion by the Scottish National Party

followed by, no later than 12.20 pm Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by, no later than 3.15 pm Stage 1 Debate on the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill

followed by Motion on a Financial Resolution required in relation to the provisions of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 6 October 1999

2.30 pm Executive Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 7 October 1999

9.30 am Ministerial Statement and Debate on the Executive's Expenditure Plans

12.20 pm Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by, no later than 3.15 pm Executive Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S1M-167, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Question, That the meeting be now adjourned until 2.30 pm today, *put and agreed to.*—[Mr McCabe.]

Meeting adjourned at 12:35.

14:30

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before we begin the afternoon session, I want to respond to the points of order that were raised at the end of the morning.

It is the policy of the chair to try to include as many members as possible in debates. That may sometimes mean that a debate will overrun by a few minutes. Frankly, the alternative is to do what they do at the House of Commons, which is to cut people off in mid-sentence. I believe that a bit of flexibility is to be encouraged.

I have read the report of the Procedures Committee's meeting on Tuesday, which indicates that during question time the chair should be stricter on irrelevant supplementaries and on members making statements instead of asking questions. I propose to follow the committee's advice.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Agritay Ltd

1. Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that the high value of sterling was a major factor in the recent job losses at Agritay Ltd in Dundee. (S1O-361)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): The Scottish Executive deeply regrets the loss of jobs at Agritay Ltd. I spoke today to Cameron McLatchie, the head of British Polythene Ltd, which owns Agritay. He said that there were three main reasons for the problems. First, the company was on the verge of going into receivership when it was purchased three years ago. Agritay sells to United Kingdom chemical and fertiliser businesses, many of which have recently lost markets. Secondly, the company was exporting significantly to Europe, but that market has gone quiet and has become uncompetitive. Thirdly, and most significantly according to Mr McLatchie, many of the bags that are manufactured—it is essentially an industrial textile business—are now being brought in from the far east, the middle east and eastern Europe, where labour costs are much lower than in the UK. The company has lost £500,000 in the past 18 months.

I appreciate that many businesses, particularly manufacturers that deal with Europe, including Agritay, have had concerns about the value of sterling. However, it is important to point out that

the level of sterling did not prevent the level of Scottish manufactured exports growing by 8.3 per cent in real terms in the year to end March 1999.

The Presiding Officer: Before we go any further, may I say that I am going to have to be tough on the length of ministerial answers as well.

Shona Robison: I thank the minister for his acknowledgement that interest rates and the value of the pound were factors identified by Agritay's management, as well as by the convener of Aberdeen economic development committee and by one of the Administration's back-bench members. What is he going to do about making representations to the UK Government about the value of the pound and the high level of interest rates?

Nicol Stephen: Most parties in this chamber—certainly the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party—support the idea of decisions on such crucial economic issues being taken out of the hands of politicians and being made instead by financial and economic experts, either at the Bank of England or in Europe. The vital message that the Scottish Executive needs to get across is not that exporters need a weak pound, but that they need currency stability and predictability to help them secure greater export markets.

Farm Support

2. Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made on the introduction of an independent appeal mechanism for farmers suffering penalties in relation to their European Union subsidy claims. (S10-368)

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie): An examination of possible options for an independent appeal mechanism is under way. Details of the proposed arrangements will be issued for consultation by the end of the year.

Euan Robson: I thank the minister for his answer and for his courtesy in being in the chamber today when there are distractions—or attractions—elsewhere.

Does the minister accept that farmers are alarmed at the bureaucracy and inflexibility of the rules governing integrated administration and control scheme subsidy claims and at the handling of such claims? Will he undertake to include current disputes in the appeals procedure?

Ross Finnie: I sympathise with Mr Robson's point about inflexibility. I regret to say that the determination of flexibility is entirely in the hands of the European Commission and the European Union, which set down the rules. There have been one or two—and only one or two—relaxations in

how we are able to implement those rules, but I regret that flexibility is not in the hands of the Scottish Executive.

On prior claims, the scheme that I hope, as I said, to put out for consultation before the end of the year will have to meet European convention on human rights requirements. Retrospection is not built in or required and it would be neither practical nor practicable.

Housing

3. Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what level of response there has been, through consultation on the housing green paper, to the anti-social tenant measures outlined therein. (S10-373)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): As set out in the green paper, significant measures have been put in place to tackle anti-social behaviour. Several respondents suggested that further steps are needed. We are considering the potential for further measures in the context of responses received and in the context of the partnership agreement.

Cathie Craigie: Does the minister agree that combined efforts are needed by the Parliament, the police, communities, courts and local authorities to ensure that people are able to enjoy peace and quiet in their own homes? Does she also agree that it is not acceptable for the lives of the vast majority of decent people to be made miserable by a small minority who behave in an anti-social way?

Ms Alexander: I agree with Cathie Craigie. As she knows, we have introduced anti-social behaviour orders and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 provides the police with powers to seize noise-making equipment. I confirm that research into the legal process is under way, to identify any unreasonable delays in dealing with cases of anti-social behaviour.

Dumfries and Galloway Economic Forum

4. David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on the establishment of the Dumfries and Galloway economic forum. (S10-342)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): David Mundell will know that the decision to establish the forum was taken when Henry McLeish visited the area on 4 August. Officials from the Scottish Executive, Dumfries and Galloway Enterprise, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board had a very constructive meeting on Monday 20 September to discuss the role and composition of the Dumfries and Galloway economic forum.

David Mundell: I welcome the minister's answer. However, is he aware that a recent survey shows that Dumfries and Galloway has the lowest level of take-home pay in Scotland? Does he agree that one of the first priorities of the forum should be to address the issue of bringing well-paid jobs into the area—in particular, jobs of the kind that the Government could distribute to Dumfries and Galloway if it follows through on its decentralisation proposals?

Nicol Stephen: I agree with David Mundell's objective. We want to have high-paid jobs—the last thing we want Scotland to be ambitious for is low-cost, low-quality jobs. I know that there is an existing joint economic strategy and I hope that this new initiative will lift the momentum for jobs in Dumfries and Galloway and provide the sort of work that David Mundell suggested.

Health Care

5. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what it intends to do to address the inequalities in health between men and women in Scotland. (S1O-366)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): There are clear differences between the health needs of men and women, but we should not forget that the life circumstances of individuals are also a key factor in health inequalities. Reducing inequalities between rich and poor will also help to tackle the different health needs of men and women. The Scottish Executive is committed to tackling health inequalities through national programmes on cancer, heart disease and child health. We will ensure a fairer allocation of national health service resources in future, in order to ensure that local health services meet real need.

Mary Scanlon: Does the minister share my concern at the rising suicide rate among young men in the light of last week's evidence that no psychiatric beds were available in the whole of Scotland?

Susan Deacon: I am concerned about the rising suicide rate among young men and about the many other problems that affect men in particular—I looked at some of those in detail last week when I attended an event in connection with men's health week. The health service and other agencies are getting better at recognising men's needs and they must continue to improve. The last part of Mrs Scanlon's statement is inaccurate. It is important that questions should be based on facts.

Road Maintenance

6. Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to introduce a Scottish equivalent of the

national roads maintenance condition survey in England. (S1O-367)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): Presiding Officer, I would like to point out that Sarah Boyack is in Ireland today on Government business. She is attending an important European meeting and obviously, therefore, we must stand in for her. I am mindful of your advice, so as far as the question is concerned, the answer is no. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Tosh: I had hoped that Ms Boyack's new deputy might take the question—*[Applause.]*—perhaps he has.

The First Minister: Very subtle, very subtle.

Mr Tosh: Does the Scottish Executive have, or does it plan to make available to itself, up-to-date and accurate information on the trunk road maintenance backlog? Will the money that is allocated in the Executive's programme for that backlog be sufficient to deal with on-going maintenance? How many years, at current projected levels of expenditure, does the First Minister expect it will take to eliminate that backlog?

The First Minister: We do not have a national roads maintenance condition survey in Scotland because a more comprehensive survey is under way. The results are in table 5.5—"Trunk Road Network: Residual Life (Years)"—of "Scottish Transport Statistics 1999". If Mr Tosh wishes the technicalities, the table is based on deflectographs, high-speed surveys and scrim—or skidding resistance—with 100 per cent coverage every two years. I hope that I have supplied some interesting reading for Mr Tosh in the immediate future.

Mr Tosh: Oh that Mr Salmond were here to hear the man who raised the ceefax question. I am grateful to the First Minister for indicating where the information might be found. Could he indicate whether the sums that are allocated are likely—in his judgment—to allow on-going maintenance at an appropriate rate and the elimination of backlogs and maintenance within a reasonable time scale?

The First Minister: This is one of the areas in which there probably never is enough money. It is certainly one of the areas that has suffered a lack of funding in the past. Mr Tosh will know, of course, that there is an increased allocation of £45 million in 1999-2000, as against the allocation of £25 million in 1998-99. Matters are improving, as they generally are in public expenditure, over the period of the comprehensive spending review. I am sure that he will join me in welcoming that fact.

Kincardine Power Station

7. Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what

discussions have taken place with Scottish Power regarding the site and future use of the former Kincardine power station. (S1O-350)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): There have been discussions with Scottish Power on this issue. Scottish Power is part of a consortium undertaking a feasibility study into the possible establishment of a clean coal gasification power station at Kincardine. The consortium has gained EU financing under the THERMIE programme for this study. Scottish Ministers would have to consider and approve an application for consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 if the proposal were to progress to construction. I understand that such an application from Scottish Power could be at least five years away.

Bruce Crawford: I am grateful for that answer. It does not require me to tell the minister that Clackmannanshire and west Fife have experienced severe job losses recently. I am aware of the clean coal plan, but it will not take up the whole of the site. Will the Executive ask Fife Enterprise and Forth Valley Enterprise to carry out a joint study on the possible future uses of this strategically important site on the banks of the Forth? The site has the potential to produce innovative future use solutions—

The Presiding Officer: We have had the question.

Bruce Crawford: I hope that the minister will support my suggestion.

Nicol Stephen: The power station is being dismantled and the proposal for the new facility includes part of its site. Bearing that in mind, I will be happy to contact the local enterprise companies to encourage further investigation. I am not sure that I would call for a formal study at this stage.

Women Offenders

8. Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions have taken place with the Scottish Prison Service in relation to women offenders. (S1O-360)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay): The Scottish Prison Service has made encouraging progress in improving conditions for women prisoners. It has also participated in the inter-agency forum set up last year to address the issues highlighted in "A Safer Way", the joint prisons and social work report on women offenders.

Conditions for women offenders are one of many issues that the Minister for Justice, Jim Wallace, and I raised in our first meeting with the

chief executive of the Prison Service more than two months ago.

Michael Matheson: Is the minister aware that, in the Prison Service annual report, the chief inspector of prisons raised concerns about the number of women who are being placed in prison and that he raised particular concerns about remand prisoners?

In light of the fact that the previous justice minister, Mr Henry McLeish, stated that one of his key tasks would be to reduce the number of women being placed in prison, what new action is the Executive prepared to take to ensure that this issue is addressed urgently?

Angus MacKay: A major review of community disposals took place last year. The chief inspectors of prisons and social work collaborated on that report.

A follow-up review is taking place under the auspices of Professor Sheila McLean. The committee that is dealing with the follow-up report has met eight times and we await a further report from Professor McLean.

A number of measures have been put in place in respect of bail retrieval for women prisoners who are remanded in custody. They are available as a result of the committee's work.

Roads (A9)

9. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when work will commence on the scheduled major improvements to the A9 at Berriedale and between Navidale and the Ord of Caithness. (S1O-352)

The Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison): Proposals for improvements on the A9 between Navidale and the Ord of Caithness are being considered in the strategic roads review. Sarah Boyack plans to report on the review shortly.

Mr Stone: I thank the minister for his answer. As a good highlander, he will be aware of the transport problems in the remoter parts of Scotland. Regarding Berriedale, will the minister press my case with Sarah Boyack and her civil servants on her return? I seek a meeting to further this cause.

Mr Morrison: I will be delighted to convey that request to Sarah Boyack's private office.

Railway Station (Dysart)

10. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it has made in the opening of a new rail station at Dysart. (S1O-348)

The Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison): I understand that the south Fife and Forth estuary public transport study, commissioned by Fife Council, is reviewing the transport options for the area, including the merits of a station at Dysart.

Marilyn Livingstone: Can the minister give me some indication of what the time scale will be? Will he further request a meeting with Sarah Boyack to discuss this issue?

Mr Morrison: Ms Boyack is in great demand today.

My understanding is that the report nears completion and might be available in three to four weeks.

I will be delighted to convey the request for a meeting.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Boyack will be sorry that she ever went to Ireland.

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

11. Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what selection criteria have been employed in determining the membership of the new board of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. (S1O-375)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): Members of the SEPA board are appointed in accordance with paragraph 4 of schedule 6 to the Environment Act 1995, which states:

"In making appointments, Scottish Ministers shall have regard to the desirability of appointing persons who have knowledge or experience in some matter relevant to the functions of SEPA."

Alex Johnstone: Is the First Minister prepared to comment on suggestions that there might be a geographical imbalance in the new appointments, in that some regions have not been adequately represented? Will he further comment on the suggestion that there may also be an industry imbalance, in that some Scottish industries are inadequately represented? Will he comment on the suggestion that there might be a political reflection of the new Executive in the new appointments?

The First Minister: I am very sorry that Mr Johnstone harbours these somewhat unfortunate thoughts. I would have hoped that he had more faith in the good judgment of the Executive.

There are 11 members of SEPA, apart from the chairman, so it is just possible that the odd industry, and perhaps some areas of Scotland, will not be directly represented. That is inevitable. There are three elected members out of 12, of whom one happens to be a Labour member, but

that does not seem to suggest any desperate outbreak of cronyism.

The important thing is to have on the SEPA board people who have the talents, the interests and the equipment to do the job well. I am satisfied that we have. I remind Mr Johnstone that there are three regional boards, and that they represent fully the geographical extent of Scotland.

Drug Trafficking

12. Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that enhanced powers to seize the assets of organised criminals, similar to those of the Criminal Assets Bureau in the Republic of Ireland, would help the fight against dealers in illegal drugs. (S1O-365)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay): Effective powers of confiscation are essential in our fight against illegal drugs. I intend to ensure that the powers that are available to the Executive and to enforcement agencies are effective. I am considering a range of options.

Mr McNeil: I welcome the minister's answer, as I am sure the families and communities throughout Scotland who have suffered as a result of drug-dealing activities would welcome such powers being available. I understand that, under the current system, the proceeds from assets of convicted drug dealers—

The Presiding Officer: Mr McNeil, we must have a question.

Mr McNeil: I know that you are going to be strict today, Presiding Officer, and I am coming to the question.

The Presiding Officer: How long, O Lord, how long?

Mr McNeil: The proceeds from the assets of convicted drug dealers, like fines, go into a consolidated fund. Will the minister investigate whether those assets could be returned to the communities from which they were taken? That would be a welcome boost for local drug prevention groups.

The Presiding Officer: There was a question in the middle, there.

Angus MacKay: As members may be aware, I have been invited by the Irish justice minister to visit Dublin to look at the drug enforcement practices of the Irish Government. While I am there, one of the subjects that I shall be interested to discuss is how assets that have been seized from criminals can be used in communities for preventive and rehabilitative work. While I am in Dublin, any inquiries for information on meetings

can be relayed to my office through the usual source, Mr Alasdair Morrison.

Housing

13. Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what contingency plans it has for investment in housing and housing maintenance where tenants reject stock transfer proposals by ballot. (S1O-374)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): Where tenants reject stock transfer proposals, the council concerned will continue to be eligible for housing revenue account allocation from the Scottish Executive.

Mr Quinan: Does the minister agree that, in the event of a ballot rejection, the level of investment will not match the investment that there would have been if the ballot had been positive rather than negative, and that, in reality, this is a form of blackmail?

Ms Alexander: Mr Quinan ignores the fact that the decision on the future of Glasgow's housing will be made by Glasgow's tenants alone.

Several members: Glasgow's?

Teachers' Pay

15. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S1O-267 given by Mr Sam Galbraith on 9 September 1999, whether it will make a statement on the up-to-date position on the teachers' pay dispute. (S1O-363)

The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock): Yesterday, Sam Galbraith announced that an independent committee of inquiry is to be established to make recommendations on a new pay and conditions package for teachers, and on a future mechanism for delivering and determining the pay and conditions for teachers.

Dennis Canavan: If the minister really wants to reward teachers who want a good career structure without having to leave the classroom, why is there no classroom teacher on the committee that is to be chaired by Professor McCrone, who was a civil servant at the Scottish Office for more than 20 years? Why is the minister consulting only that so-called independent chairman before filling the remaining vacancy, which almost inevitably will lead to suspicions of McCroneyism?

Peter Peacock: On the first point, this Administration has a strong desire to ensure that teachers are rewarded for the job they do in the classroom, because they do a superb job. However, the present arrangements fail teachers by failing to give them the appropriate rewards to

satisfy their needs as well as their communities' need for a strong education system.

In answer to Mr Canavan's second point, the composition of the inquiry team is broad. Two head teachers and a director of education will advise the team. The head teachers have been right through the school system and have seen the whole panoply of what goes on in a school, so they are well placed to make judgments, as is the director of education.

As to the final point about the vacancy, it is thought only proper that the chairman should be given the opportunity to consult ministers as to whom they think the last person in the team should be. There is no question whatever of cronyism.

Community Planning

16. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in the community planning process currently being undertaken by Scottish local authorities. (S1O-372)

The Deputy Minister for Local Government (Mr Frank McAveety): We want to learn from the experience of the five pathfinder councils, which have now reported, and to build on that experience. One of the key elements of the new consultation document on the McIntosh report will be community planning.

Karen Whitefield: Does the Executive intend to implement the proposals of the community planning working group to provide a statutory basis for community planning?

Mr McAveety: As I said in my earlier statement, we are confident that there will be an opportunity for that debate during the consultation process. Those who want to argue for community planning and for other matters referred to in the document will have the chance to present their case. The authorities that have engaged in the pathfinder projects and found them to be beneficial will no doubt make such submissions, and I encourage others to give thought to the matter in the near future.

Telecommunications Equipment

17. Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what guidance it will give local authorities on the implementation of an article 4 direction to restrict permitted development and require application to be made for the erection of all telecommunications equipment, regardless of height. (S1O-376)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): Current guidance on the use of article 4 directions in relation to telecommunications developments is at

paragraph 21 of the Scottish development department's circular 25/1985. We propose to introduce measures to give planning authorities greater influence over the siting and design of telecommunications developments generally, and masts in particular, as soon as possible; and will consider the need to amend the guidance at that time.

Elaine Smith: What further guidance will be provided to local authorities with regard to the acceptance of public perception of danger as a valid planning consideration?

The First Minister: There will be a 42-day prior approval scheme for ground-based masts up to 15 m in height to allow for public advertisement of a proposal. As I said, local authorities will have additional powers in such matters.

As to health hazards, I must tell Elaine Smith that the mainstream scientific and medical advice that is available to the Executive suggests that there is very little or no risk to health. However, the National Radiological Protection Board has established an expert working group to examine mobile phone emissions, and any information that emerges will be considered very carefully indeed.

Pensioners (Concessionary Travel)

18. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is considering measures to improve concessionary travel schemes for pensioners. (S1O-346)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): Schemes are currently administered by local authorities. We shall consider appropriate ways to encourage their improvement and integration for pensioners and people with special needs.

Malcolm Chisholm: Does the minister agree that although a wise decision about next year's pension increase is reserved to Westminster, there are many areas, including public transport, in which this Parliament can advance the interests of pensioners? I welcome the fact that the minister has talked about integration and I urge the Executive to move as quickly as possible towards a national concessionary travel scheme for pensioners.

Jackie Baillie: The Executive is keen to make progress in such matters and is giving active consideration to establishing, with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, a joint working group to examine ways in which we can harmonise the schemes.

Deaf People

19. Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it intends to set up a national register for deaf people. (S1O-344)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): The Scottish Executive has no current plans to set up a national register. We are committed to addressing the needs of deaf people and those with other disabilities across all the work of the Executive. Tomorrow, ministers will hold a disability issues theme day with a wide range of organisations, including those representing deaf people, to hear their views and to address issues of concern to them.

Mrs Mulligan: Is the minister aware that the Institute of Hearing Research at the University of Nottingham has developed a system to categorise the level of hearing loss, which could be used to identify people with moderate to severe hearing loss—the people who are most in need of service provision—so allowing services to be targeted at those most in need?

Susan Deacon: I was not aware of the initiative but I am happy to look at it if it will complement the work that we are undertaking in this area.

Open Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I remind members that supplementary questions have to be on the same subject as the main question.

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Meetings)

1. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how many times the First Minister has met the Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1 July 1999 to discuss matters relating to the public expenditure survey and its implications for the Scottish block. (S1O-364)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): As Mr McLetchie would expect, the Scottish Executive maintains close contacts with the UK Government on a wide range of issues, including matters relating to public expenditure.

David McLetchie: I am glad that the First Minister is in active discussions with his friend the chancellor. Since he has been doing such a good job today as stand-in transport minister, will he use his influence with the chancellor on the next occasion that they meet to persuade him to devote a far higher proportion of the tax revenues that are currently derived from motorists to transport throughout the UK, thereby enabling Ms Boyack to tackle Scotland's transport needs more effectively than at present?

The First Minister: The balance is of course always under consideration and no doubt my colleague the chancellor will be thinking about that, as all of us are. The important thing to note is that, as against the plans that we inherited, there has been a very substantial improvement in public spending over the comprehensive spending review period—the equivalent of about £800 for every man, woman and child in Scotland. I hope that, in the years ahead, we will be able to build public services and to continue the fairly heavy investment that we already make in public transport, particularly in remoter rural areas.

David McLetchie: The First Minister's priorities are not those of Scotland's motorists. It is all very well to claim that there are increases in public expenditure across the board, but the specific issue is expenditure on transport. Did the First Minister see the report this weekend in *Scotland on Sunday* about a haulier based in the Borders who had re-registered his fleet of vehicles in the Republic of Ireland in order to save his business £22,000 in excise duties? When the First Minister next meets the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will he tell him that his policies not only are deeply damaging to Scottish businesses but will be

counterproductive? Higher taxes will lead to lower tax revenues in total—the chancellor is cutting off his nose to spite his face.

The First Minister: I am delighted to see that Mr McLetchie is following the doctrines of Mr Laffer, the right-wing American economist. His assumption is very optimistic. It is important that we maintain investment, obviously. I was interested in Mr McLetchie's choice of words—£22,000 in vehicle excise duties. If Mr McLetchie was a businessman doing that calculation, he would look at the level of corporation tax, at labour costs and at a large number of other factors; he might find that the simplistic comparison that he makes does not stand up to examination. There is, as I said, always a balance to be held and I look forward to further encouraging, through the rural transport fund and through direct Scottish Executive subvention, the many lifeline and other services that we already support.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): Does the Executive consider that the block grant will be sufficient to ensure that people who are referred this month to the dermatology clinic at the royal infirmary in Edinburgh will be seen before August 2000? If it does not consider the block grant large enough to meet that objective—as was suggested in the document that we looked at two weeks ago—which member of the Executive will feel obliged to resign?

The Presiding Officer: I do not see the First Minister discussing that matter with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Ms MacDonald: It is about the block grant.

The First Minister: Oh, it is about the block grant. [*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: Well, just.

The First Minister: No one would ever accuse Margo MacDonald of lack of persistence. "It's the economy, stupid."

Of course I will draw my colleagues' attention to that matter. Sometimes, press and other reports exaggerate. In any event, the funding of the health service in Scotland over this three-year period is in a remarkably healthier state than it was previously. We are very proud of that. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Fortunately, I have selective deafness: I did not hear that remark.

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

The Presiding Officer: May we take it after questions so that it does not interrupt the flow?

Alex Fergusson: Yes.

Education

2. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what are the details of its education policy. (S10-358)

The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock): Obviously, it would take much longer than the time that we have left this afternoon to set out all the details of the Government's policies on education, because of their width, depth and progressive nature. However, the details of our policy commitments were set out in our programme for government.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am not sure that it would take as long as the minister suggests. However, like all members of this Parliament, I am looking forward to debating in due course the detailed provisions of the education bill.

Does the minister agree that the approach taken by the Minister for Children and Education to the on-going dispute over teachers' pay and conditions now threatens to undermine the rest of the Executive's agenda, in that it has brought the teaching profession closer to industrial action than it has been at any time in the previous 10 years? Does he also agree that, instead of choosing to bat this problem to yet another inquiry, the Executive might do better to face up to the difficulty now and provide the additional resources necessary to bring about a satisfactory and peaceful settlement to this dispute?

Peter Peacock: The approach that Sam Galbraith has taken since becoming minister has been one of extraordinary commitment and of trying to find a way forward in which to change the tone and atmosphere of the debate surrounding Scottish education. For far too long, debate about Scottish education has taken place against a negative backcloth, and Sam Galbraith has done more than any individual to try to make the tone positive. He has gone out of his way to recognise the position of teachers and the job that they do.

We are seeking a long-term solution to what has been a problem in Scottish education for too long. That is our objective and I wish that the SNP would join us in that. I look forward to seeing the evidence that Nicola Sturgeon will produce to the independent inquiry, so that we can see what her position is in detail and not just hear it through soundbites.

Nicola Sturgeon: I note that the minister neatly sidestepped the issue of resources, in the same way as the Minister for Children and Education has chosen to do on every occasion so far.

While we are on education resources, will the minister agree that this Labour Government is spending less on education, as a percentage of gross domestic product, than the Tories did in the

last few years of their Administration? At the end of the comprehensive spending review period, the Government will be spending 4.9 per cent of GDP on education, which compares with the lowest percentage under the Tory Administration—4.9 per cent in 1995-96. Figures from the House of Commons library show that, although spending on education is planned to increase as a proportion of GDP during the CSR period, it will not return to the levels recorded in the early 1990s.

Peter Peacock: The important thing to recognise is that, in Scotland, resources for education are growing progressively. To ensure that we make progress in Scottish education, this Government has put money back in—something like £1.3 billion extra—to try to repair some of the damage that was done by our Conservative colleagues. The national grid for learning, which Nicola Sturgeon wanted to dismantle, has been put in place. There has also been the excellence fund, assistance in classrooms, measures to reduce class sizes and so on. The catalogue is almost endless. This Government is prepared to find the resources to improve education.

Nicola Sturgeon mentioned the teachers' dispute. As Sam Galbraith indicated yesterday, we have made additional resources available to try to find a solution to that dispute and we remain willing to continue to hold discussions in the interests of finding a solution.

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the Scottish Executive understand the utter demoralisation throughout the secondary school education system at the proposal effectively to demolish the promoted posts structure?

Peter Peacock: We are trying to find a long-term answer to this problem to tackle the fact that teachers have felt beleaguered over many years. We realise that they feel that there is an initiative overload, but it is difficult to turn that around in a short period. Our commitment is to find the answers to those problems and to ensure that we move forward.

Mr Tosh refers to the proposals made by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities through the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education. Those proposals have been put to one side while the inquiry looks to the long term. We are desperately trying to find the long-term solution.

Council of the Isles

3. Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what is the current position in regard to the establishment of the council of the isles. (S10-354)

The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell): Strand 3 of the Belfast agreement

envisages the establishment of a British-Irish council. The council will comprise representatives of the British and Irish Governments, the devolved Administrations within the UK and the authorities in the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey. A treaty providing for the council's establishment was signed in Dublin on 8 March. The council will come into operation on the day that the powers are devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr Raffan: Will the minister clarify why the council of the isles is being transmogrified into the British-Irish council? Was that done under pressure from the Irish Government as a result of its concern to have links at a Westminster level and to include the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly as well?

Mr McConnell: No, the name of the new body and the arrangements for it were a result of the detailed negotiations that took place in Belfast last year. We should respect the delicate nature of those negotiations and the fact that, for the first time in history, not only have all the political parties in the north of Ireland signed up to an agreement—however difficult we are currently finding the implementation of that agreement—but the people of Northern Ireland voted overwhelmingly for it in a referendum.

Mr Raffan: Will the minister agree that the council could have great value not only in producing harmonious relationships between the different parts of the islands, but as a forum to discuss matters of mutual interest, such as transport links and European Union issues? Would it not be a good idea to set it up at least in part, perhaps with the Irish joining us later? That would be particularly important for those of us who take a federalist, as opposed to an isolationist and separatist, approach.

Mr McConnell: I could not agree more. The establishment of the British-Irish council will be a good thing for the people of Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland. That is a positive comment. We must respect the terms of the Belfast agreement and it is important that we encourage and help to smooth the road of progress towards devolved administration in Northern Ireland. Anything that we did to upset the balance in the short term or in the long term would be wrong.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): Will the minister ensure that he gives the best wishes of this Parliament to Senator George Mitchell, Mo Mowlam and the members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, who are trying to make progress in a difficult situation? When he transmits our best wishes to them, will he ensure that they know that we—not just the Scottish Executive, but the Scottish Parliament—are keen to play our part in the council of the isles and that we look forward to

a close working relationship with them in future years?

Mr McConnell: I am sure that all members of the Scottish Parliament will agree with me when I say that, regardless of our views on the constitutional position of Scotland or anywhere else in the United Kingdom, we all want a successful resolution to the current discussions on the implementation of the Belfast agreement. We all want the establishment of devolved administration in Northern Ireland, on the basis of agreement from all the parties, to implement the will of the people as soon as possible.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister confirm that members of this Parliament would be expected to sit in the council of the isles with members of Sinn Féin-IRA?

Mr McConnell: The British-Irish council would initially be set up as an intergovernmental body, which would involve the Executives of the various devolved territories and the two Governments. In due course, we would hope that the parliamentary bodies of all those different institutions would meet as well so that there would be interparliamentary discussions as well as discussions between the Executives and Governments.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Given Ben Wallace's rather ridiculous remark—an example of what we are trying to avoid in the British isles—will the minister consider inviting members of the Dail and the Northern Ireland Assembly to see how we go about matters here to encourage them further?

Mr McConnell: I would not be surprised if the First Minister passes on that invitation when he visits Dublin next month. I am sure that we all wish him well on that visit, when he will represent Scotland on behalf of the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: That brings us to the end of question time. I gather that Mr Fergusson does not wish to press his point of order.

Voluntary Sector

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We proceed now to the debate on motion SM1-165, on the voluntary sector, in the name of Jackie Baillie. Because of the large number of members who want to be called in this debate, speeches from back benchers will be limited to four minutes.

15:15

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): In my speech, I want to draw attention to the importance of the voluntary sector in Scotland today, to highlight some important measures that we have already put in place to help strengthen its role and to outline where we intend to go from here.

The voluntary sector has a long and proud tradition in Scotland. More than 50 per cent of the adult population has had some involvement in volunteering, and 25 per cent of the population volunteers on a regular basis. That is a powerful indicator of the Scottish people's commitment to helping others in their communities.

There are more than 44,000 voluntary organisations, 27,000 of which are registered as charities. The sector has an annual income of more than £1.8 billion a year, which represents 3 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product. It provides 100,000 jobs—4.5 per cent of the total number of jobs in Scotland. However, the spread across Scotland is not even, and we are examining that. Rural areas have the highest number of voluntary organisations per head of population, whereas the older industrial areas have the lowest.

The role of voluntary groups and volunteers has enormous potential to help us to achieve our shared goals of promoting community development and active citizenship. Our challenge is to build on that foundation.

I want to say a little about the policy context in which we are working. Our programme for government, "Making it work together", recognises the key role that the voluntary sector plays in tackling poverty and in regenerating communities. However, the sector's importance goes far wider than that. With their diversity and strong base in disadvantaged communities, voluntary organisations are well placed to support a whole range of policies aimed at improving the lives and opportunities of ordinary people in Scotland.

Two principal policy aims will drive our agenda. First, recognising and acknowledging the role of the sector in the implementation of policy objectives, the Scottish Executive will develop a productive relationship that accurately reflects the

needs of both parties. Secondly, strategic decisions on support for the sector will focus on the fact that volunteering and the voluntary sector are at the heart of community development—one of our key emerging priorities.

The specific objectives that flow from those aims are to strengthen the infrastructure of the voluntary sector and of volunteering as a priority, and to develop the existing role of the voluntary sector across a wide range of the Executive's policy areas, including community care, child care services, housing, employment, criminal justice, rural policy and health. We will also maximise the part that the voluntary sector plays in our social inclusion and regeneration policies.

We have already taken specific steps to support our commitment to the voluntary sector. First, we have committed ourselves to promoting a new way of working. There are already close links between Government and the voluntary sector, but we mean to build them into a close working partnership between the two sectors for the future. The foundations have already been laid with the Scottish compact, which was launched in October 1998. The Scottish Executive wants to give that a fresh impetus; later in the autumn, we will ask the Parliament to endorse the compact so that we can send out a clear signal of its commitment to work in partnership with the voluntary sector.

Secondly, within Government we are giving a much clearer direction to our work with the voluntary sector. We have made important changes in the way in which the Scottish Executive is structured. The voluntary issues unit will in future have a far more strategic role. It has been located in the centre of the Administration, where it is well placed to reach right across the Executive. It will work to raise the profile of voluntary issues in discussions about Scottish policy. That is what the voluntary sector has campaigned for, and that is what we have delivered. The Executive has acknowledged the crucial role that the sector can play in both the development of policy and the delivery of responsive services.

Thirdly, we mean to create a stable infrastructure to support voluntary and community action at all levels. The Government has committed £1 million to support the infrastructure for volunteering and we are creating a network of local volunteering development agencies. More than 92 per cent of the population of Scotland already has access to a local volunteering development agency and we have provided the funds to create an agency in each local authority area by March 2000.

We are also addressing the problems of the uneven spread of the voluntary sector across Scotland, which I mentioned. Last month, we

announced a review of councils for voluntary service. That review will consider how the network might contribute to building the voluntary capacity throughout Scotland in relation to the priorities that I outlined.

I know that funding is a continuing concern for many voluntary groups. The Scottish Executive provides a substantial amount—more than £283 million—to national voluntary organisations and to the infrastructure bodies that support local groups. In that way, the Government complements the work being done at community level by local authorities.

The Executive recognises the need not only to provide the resources but to have a funding strategy in place that promotes future stability. It is for that reason that we intend to work with the voluntary sector to prepare a code of good practice on funding. That will form the basis of a more strategic and co-ordinated approach within the Executive.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Stability of funding is crucial to the sector. I welcome the Executive's commitment to three-year funding. The problem is—as I said in the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee last week—that we need a similar commitment from local government and health boards.

Jackie Baillie: I can assure the member that we will be working closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to deliver that. A number of councils lead the way in good practice.

The Executive will also work with other major funders, such as local councils and the National Lottery Charities Board, to provide a more stable funding framework. We are committed to undertaking a comprehensive review of charity law to reform existing legislation and create a framework that is fit for the 21st century.

We have a number of key strands already in place to support our commitment to the sector. In addition, I have recently made announcements aimed at boosting two new programmes for the voluntary sector. The first is called the giving age. In Scotland, the initiative is being taken forward by the Scottish giving age working group which is preparing a strategy that will be published next year. The strategy will have community empowerment as both its underlying philosophy and its ultimate aim. I have announced more than £250,000 of new money to support that initiative.

The second new programme is millennium volunteers, which sets out to encourage young people aged between 16 and 25 to develop their personal skills in a way that will result in lasting benefit to their communities. I was pleased to announce more than £400,000 of grants for new

millennium volunteer projects earlier this month.

I said that we wanted the voluntary sector to have a central role in our policies for community action and active citizenship. Both those new programmes promote that aim.

I believe that, in Scotland, policy makers are at last recognising the key role that communities can and should play in shaping the delivery of their services and in building community capacity to determine and tackle local priorities.

Many policies have adopted a much clearer focus on communities. They include: social inclusion partnerships; the national strategy of tenant participation; communities that care; initiatives at the edge; and the "Improving Health" white paper. The list is endless and all the policies have active communities at their core. The initiatives demonstrate the potential of the voluntary sector and volunteering in its widest sense to boost efforts to put active citizenship at the centre of policy development.

In considering the role of the voluntary sector, we too often assume that its contribution is limited to the sphere of social policy. The evidence is growing that the sector makes a significant impact in the economic field, too. I have already referred to the 100,000 jobs that the third sector provides, but I have not yet said that the sector enjoys the fastest job growth of any sector in the European economy. Work done in the Highlands and Islands suggests that the social economy accounts for an annual income of more than £200 million. That represents a significant contribution to sustaining the economic life of those rural communities.

A 1997 study into employment in lowland Scotland found that total paid employment in the sector was roughly equal to that in the Scottish electronics industry, one of our main growth sectors. There are more social economy jobs in Drumchapel than there is employment provided by the Great Western retail park. When we look at the future potential of the voluntary sector, it is crucial that we recognise and support the role that it increasingly plays in the social economy as a direct contributor to our economic prosperity.

The Scottish Executive has made it clear that it values the role of the voluntary sector. We will bring forward the compact to promote partnership working, give a commitment to a fairer funding framework and guarantee the sector's independence to speak out. We will build a stronger infrastructure and involve it directly in policy making. In the past, the relationship between Government and the sector has often been unequal but, with these initiatives, we are redefining that relationship.

The Scottish Executive is firmly committed to working in partnership with the voluntary sector. I

look forward to working with the Parliament and with the Social Inclusion, Housing and the Voluntary Sector Committee to promote policies designed to help voluntary organisations flourish in Scotland in the 21st century.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's recognition of the important role of the voluntary sector in Scottish society through the contribution it makes to economic prosperity, promoting social inclusion and encouraging active citizenship; endorses the Executive's commitment to create a stable infrastructure in which the voluntary sector can flourish, and welcomes the firm intention to work in partnership with the sector in delivering the Programme for Government.

15:26

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP):

On behalf of the Parliament, I thank and welcome the many volunteers and representatives of voluntary organisations who have come to the chamber today to listen to the debate. I also thank the Deputy Minister for Communities for her statement. The Scottish National party will support the motion, although there are several things that we would like to point out. We do not support entirely the programme for government, but otherwise we fully support the motion. I am glad to hear that an SNP proposal of nearly 10 years' standing, on three-year accounting and funding, has been adopted by the Executive.

The role of the voluntary sector in Scotland involves not just day-to-day work on the ground, providing assistance, care, community work, education, housing and social assistance. It is at the mercy of the consequences of Government decision making and economic conditions. As a result, the sector has had to respond quickly to many changes, and has developed policy to adapt to changes in circumstances in Scotland. That policy development role has been undervalued by politicians in the past. I thank the Executive for the value that it places on the voluntary sector, but it is vital that those at the coal face of the voluntary organisations—indeed those in the gallery today—are given the opportunity to shape Government policy at its heart, rather than simply react to it.

Jackie Baillie referred to the compact. I would like to talk about that a little, having spoken to a large number of voluntary organisations over the past few months. Are the benefits of the compact realistic? It will be introduced as a measure to create a flow of information from Government to the voluntary sector and vice versa. That looks good on paper—the compact is bound in a glossy cover—but, according to my consultations, the general feeling is that the sector has extensive reservations about its content.

Will setting up the compact have a significant

and positive impact on the future of the voluntary sector? Will the Government respond to the issues instigated by the voluntary sector? Will it act on those issues and not simply become an ear to which the voluntary sector can voice its opinions and concerns? Let us hope so. More important, how will those channels of communication be set up? What will the formal structures be? The compact contains some broad and sweeping gestures about its role and function, but how will it take the relationship between Government and the voluntary sector to a higher plane?

The voluntary sector has some specific concerns. What mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that the Government is carrying out the commitments that are made in the compact? Who will monitor the compact? Who will open up the channels of communication for users? That is an excellent idea, but how will the exercise be orchestrated, who will pay for it and, more important, what are the costs involved? Will the compact be reviewed? Very importantly, what will be the time scale for reviews?

Who will benefit from the compact? Will it be the users—the voluntary organisations—or the Executive, to enable it to hold up a document as a token offering to the voluntary sector?

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Mr Quinan: No, certainly not.

From what the deputy minister said today, it appears that the Government intends to address the needs of this valuable and vital sector.

As has been said, the voluntary sector had an income of £1.8 billion last year. Some of that came from trading, rents and investment and there was 26 per cent from the public sector, 22 per cent from donations and 7 per cent from the lottery—which is really a donation through the national lottery.

The voluntary sector desperately needs continuity of funding. I welcome the deputy minister's suggestions on three-year funding and accounting. I also support what Keith Raffan said: we have to formalise that with both central and local government.

There are other squeezes on the voluntary sector. Central Government provides support in the form of grants from other public bodies. In Scotland under the current Administration, support from organisations such as Scottish Homes and the enterprise companies dropped from £313 million in 1996-97 to £279 million in 1997-98—admittedly that is the last year for which figures are available.

Jackie Baillie: I have two questions, as Mr Quinan refused me the opportunity to ask a question earlier. First, the compact is endorsed by

the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, Volunteer Development Scotland and the Council of Voluntary Service Scotland, which represent the main infrastructure bodies of Scotland. Should we not trust them to guard the sector's independence and interests? I regret that he attacks a fundamental document, which has been jointly agreed.

Secondly, will Mr Quinan comment on why the returns to the Scottish Executive of Angus Council, which is an SNP-controlled local authority, show £2.5 million of support to the voluntary sector in 1996-97, but £54,000 in 1997-98?

Mr Quinan: Excellent.

The answer to the second question is straightforward: that drop was caused by cuts in local government created by central Tory-Labour Government.

Jackie Baillie: And the SNP's priorities.

Mr Quinan: Jackie Baillie misunderstands what I am saying. I said at the beginning that we support what she said. I support the compact, but am merely pointing out certain elements about which some of the organisations that she has just named have concerns. There is not a blanket agreement to the compact at this stage, as she well knows.

Jackie Baillie: Indeed, I do not.

Mr Quinan: Fair enough.

Was that an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson): You did not accept it, Mr Quinan, so it was not.

Mr Quinan: I just wondered.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please begin to wind up.

Mr Quinan: Let us consider the burden that has been placed on the third sector as a result of the policies of this Government and of the previous Government. Policies such as the new deal and changes in social work practice build in an assumption that the voluntary sector will be called on for part of policy implementation. That involvement and partnership are welcome, but the flow must be two-way and the third sector should have a say in policy development. As a consequence of that assumption, there has been a growing pressure on the work load of voluntary organisations.

The cut in council budgets, to which the deputy minister referred, and the consequent cuts especially in social work services and housing, have left holes that the voluntary sector has been forced to fill. That further increases the work load

of voluntary organisations. It highlights the need for third-sector involvement at the heart of policy making.

One means of doing that is through the civic forum, to which several of my colleagues will refer later in the debate. We should take on board the view of the consultative steering group report, that we should make use of the civic forum at the centre of government.

We thank the Executive for the move to three-year accounting, which will ensure stability and sustainability for most of the voluntary sector. However, the cost of repeated recruitment, the associated advertising and short-term contracts is far too expensive for any business and far too expensive for the third sector.

Having recognised the vital work done by the voluntary sector, particularly in regard to the alleviation of poverty, the SNP believes that the Parliament should strengthen, or make statutory, the links between local government and the third sector. Let us recognise the wealth of experience and expertise available from voluntary organisations and give them a voice at the heart of government.

We should support and expand the work of the credit unions. Let us consider legislation, here or indeed at Westminster, to create a more level playing field in which the credit union movement could flourish.

I thank the Executive for the motion; the SNP is glad to support it.

15:36

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The Conservatives support today's motion almost entirely. We congratulate the minister on her comments—we identify with and support most of them. It is perhaps strange for a Tory to stand up and be so enthusiastic, but we should all be enthusiastic about and proud of the voluntary sector in Scotland.

I have a small reservation about the wording of the motion, with respect to creating

"a stable infrastructure in which the voluntary sector can flourish".

Right throughout the 1990s and going back to the 1980s, the voluntary sector has flourished. It has grown and has made an important contribution to Scottish society. The strength of the voluntary sector has not emerged in the past two years—it has been built up over many years. If the minister is saying that the Executive will ensure that that continues and that the voluntary sector will be enhanced, that is another reason for us to support the motion.

The voluntary sector produces a newspaper called "The Third Force"—and the voluntary sector really is the third force: there is the public sector, the private sector and the voluntary sector. It is a major economic force in Scotland, which spends a lot of money, much of which comes from Government. However, the income breakdown shows that the voluntary sector has considerable earnings. I think that Mr Quinan suggested that 30 per cent of the sector's funding comes from the national lottery; my understanding is that some 7 or 8 per cent comes from the national lottery, usually through capital grants. However, 30 per cent of the funding comes from cash raised by the voluntary sector for itself.

One of the great values of the voluntary sector—as the minister mentioned—is the number of people employed by it. However, for every person who is employed by the sector, there are least three or four others who give their time and effort voluntarily. In many areas, there would be great holes in public sector facilities were the voluntary sector to drop out. Hospital shops and many of the services provided in hospitals, meals on wheels, parent-teacher associations and school boards are run by people who want to work in the community, giving their time and effort freely.

Sports in Scotland would die almost entirely without the efforts of volunteers. I regret that the lottery—and at times the Government—does not give a little more recognition to the support that is needed for sporting bodies. If the minister can find some extra cash around millennium time, I can think of one or two good projects in Ayr. In particular, I would like to put in a good word for Caledonian Football Club, whose buildings are falling into disrepair. Despite that, the club caters for 400 to 500 youngsters on a week-to-week basis. The club does that without any financial support whatever. I would like to think that the minister's compact could assist such an organisation.

Why do volunteers get involved? They get involved because they are interested in their community. They want to achieve things for their families, for their neighbours and for their community. We should encourage that. Volunteers, as we all know, gain much satisfaction from what they do. Much of their reward comes from seeing developments that would not have been thought about and could not have come to fruition without their efforts.

I have some marginal reservations about the Scottish compact. Voluntary organisations must be truly independent, but the charge might be laid that the compact contains some Government interference in the voluntary sector.

Jackie Baillie: I would like to make an intervention that I hope will be helpful and give Mr

Gallie some reassurance. The compact starts by guaranteeing the independence of the voluntary sector, and the compact will be in place only when both sectors choose to work together.

Phil Gallie: I recognise that that is the aim, and I suggested that that could give the impression of greater Government involvement. We do not want that to happen, because another major source of funding for voluntary organisations is through donations. If people who wanted to give money to voluntary organisations felt that there was a Government link, that might cause them to pull back. Neil McIntosh, before the previous election, stressed the importance of the voluntary sector maintaining its independence. I accept the deputy minister's words that the Government has no intention to dominate the voluntary sector.

Before the election, people in the voluntary sector had great expectations for this Parliament. They believed that, through the Parliament, their voices would be heard in a more significant way. They will have opportunities for that, and I am sure that many parliamentary committees have already talked—in select committee style, if I may hark back to a Westminster expression—to voluntary organisations. That will grow. However, I have one fear, that there will not be sufficient time in committees and in Parliament to cope with the voluntary sector, given the curtailed hours that we work. When I say that our hours are curtailed, I mean our parliamentary hours, because I recognise that everyone has duties in their constituencies. But if we are truly to involve the people from the important voluntary sector, we must consider overlapping the meetings of the Parliament and of the committees.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open part of the debate. Many members want to speak, so it would be helpful if members could restrict themselves to the time limit of four minutes for speeches. In an effort to be helpful, I will indicate when a member speaking has one minute left.

15:43

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I will restrict my remarks almost entirely to the funding issue, but first let me say that the Scottish Liberal Democrats join the other parties in recognising the central role that the voluntary sector plays in Scottish life. In some ways, it is different from the voluntary sector south of the border. Scotland has a lot of smaller organisations—which brings some problems, especially in relation to funding—and the voluntary sector here has a stronger connection with the public sector.

In a debate such as this, it is easy to talk in

generalities, but that is in the nature of debates on this kind of motion. I would like to give four concrete examples of funding problems that illustrate exactly what the voluntary sector is up against.

The first example is LEAD Scotland in Fife—Linking Education and Disability. It does marvellous work, which dovetails with the strategic aims of Fife Council on equal opportunities, social inclusion and lifelong learning. At the moment, its Fife organiser, Emma Whitelock, has 48 students, and the work that she does is supported by 26 volunteers, but the funding runs out at the end of this month. She has been given her redundancy notice and the project is threatened with closure. That is a prime example of what the voluntary sector is up against: in a few days, the Fife branch of a superb national organisation that works with people with disabilities will cease to exist.

It is important to address the multifaceted problems of funding. LEAD Scotland's problems go beyond Fife, because it does not receive funding from many councils. The organisation believes that since local government reorganisation, local councils have been forced to prioritise and have concentrated more on supporting home-grown voluntary agencies and groups in the local authority area. That is not a criticism; authorities have had to prioritise, but the local branches of national organisations have tended to suffer as a result.

I should be grateful if the minister gave her personal attention to that prime example of the voluntary sector's funding problems. I have a copy of a moving letter about the Fife project that was sent to Councillor Christina May, leader of the Labour administration in Fife, which asks, indeed, almost begs for £20,000 to see the project through to 31 March 2000.

My second example is the Central Fife Survivors Project, which does much good work in the field of abuse. The project, which still exists, is another example of the instability and uncertainty of funding. Urban aid ran out and the project might have closed had it not been lucky enough to receive lottery funding. Fife Council has given the project much support in the past and has again given a commitment, but the long-term future of the project is far from secure.

I am particularly interested in two projects that deal with drug problems. The Scottish Drugs Forum's under-16s project is almost entirely dependent on funding from Comic Relief. In a sense, Comic Relief itself is in the voluntary sector, so again there is no long-term certainty in that source of funding.

My final example is the Simpsons House Prisoner Offenders Project, which provides a

through-care service. The project does tremendous work and touches on an issue that I raised in this morning's debate. This debate follows on well from the earlier debate, when drug abuse issues and the problems faced by prisoners were raised. I made the point that we should not see prisons as an end in themselves, but that prisoners on release should receive a through-care approach from social services and others. The Simpsons House Prisoner Offenders Project has no statutory funding, receives 30 per cent of its funding from Lloyds TSB and has waited since March to hear from Lothian Health Board.

I hope that when the chancellor's war chest, or Treasury chest, is finally opened—perhaps ministers will attempt to find the key to it more quickly than him—more money will be disbursed to the voluntary sector from central Government. That sector should not have to rely increasingly on lottery funding, banks and corporations, which produces only instability. We need three-year core funding, towards which the Scottish Executive, local government and bodies such as health boards should work strongly.

15:48

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I welcome the debate; I fully endorse the Executive's approach to a real partnership with the voluntary sector.

This time last year, I was working in the voluntary sector and, towards the end of the first half of the financial year, I was wondering whether I would be able to pay my staff as the year closed; where our core funding would come from; and how I would replace money from the National Lottery Charities Board which was about to run out. I welcome the Executive's commitment to put secure core funding for the voluntary sector on a three-year footing.

I hope that we will find a way for local authorities to do the same. My experience is that annually applying to 32 different local authorities took up a lot of business time and was not good use of a manager's time.

I was interested to read that about 60,000 people in Scotland are employed in the voluntary sector, which, as has been pointed out, is more than the combined figure of those involved in the mining, agriculture and quarrying industries. That struck a chord for me, as I represent a former mining community. I pay tribute to those who lost their jobs as a result of the closure of deep mines and who now form the backbone of the voluntary sector and community organisations in Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley. The people who are involved as befrienders, youth workers, children's panel members, carers group members and

members of Church groups are making a significant input to their communities, having been put on the scrap-heap when the pits closed.

I pay tribute to the people who act as fund raisers for their local groups, using a multitude of skills and talents that go unrecognised and unrewarded. Allowing those people to put their skills into practice in community businesses would create a real opportunity for sustainable development.

We heard this morning about the problems of young people and crime, but I pay tribute to the young people who are involved in the voluntary sector day in, day out and week in, week out. Those young people are not the problem, but are part of the solution; they can lead us forward on how we deal with young people's problems.

I am glad that the Executive is taking the voluntary sector seriously. For too long, the reality of life in the voluntary sector—or the third sector, as I should probably call it—involved low wages with no year-on-year increases, poor working conditions, long hours, no pension rights, little access to training, lack of support and supervision and no redundancy payments when projects came to an end. I hope that the proposed partnership will address those problems by securing sufficient core funding.

I was pleased that Jackie Baillie mentioned joined-up thinking in government, in relation to other areas that impact on the voluntary sector. I want to raise a couple of points that are problematic but on which I do not expect detailed answers today, because more debate is required. The first concerns the voluntary sector in rural areas and transport costs. At a surgery last week in Auchinleck, a constituent who is a cancer patient said that he felt that he owed a tribute to the volunteer drivers who had driven him for his treatment every week. He was concerned about what might happen if road congestion charges had an impact on the voluntary sector. A number of voluntary organisations have urged us to address that concern, and I am sure that we will.

My second point concerns the potentially thorny problem of the Scottish Criminal Record Office checks, particularly in relation to children's organisations. People who are unemployed and might want to volunteer their services would not be able to pay a fee up front to prove that they did not have criminal convictions. No matter how many such checks are made, we have no guarantee that people cannot slip through the net. Scottish Criminal Record Office checks are no substitute for a good vetting procedure or for good training and supervision of volunteers.

Members of the business community often organise fund-raising events and consider the

voluntary sector in their local areas. I challenge people in the business community to undertake a social audit in their area. They could consider how to contribute to their local community in a sustainable way, not by organising one-off fund-raising events, but by ensuring that their company or organisation allowed staff to give time and expertise to the voluntary sector in the longer term.

I do not often agree with Phil Gallie, but I almost did today until he spoiled it all. I agree with what he said about the valuable organisations that work with young people, but I do not agree that we should spend more time in the chamber talking about the voluntary sector.

Phil Gallie rose—

Cathy Jamieson: I want to have time to meet the organisations and talk to the people. I still want to give some of my time on a voluntary basis, in my way and in my area.

Phil Gallie: Can I just clarify—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member has finished, Mr Gallie. Please sit down.

Phil Gallie: I was robbed.

15:53

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I want to focus on the phrase

“promoting social inclusion and encouraging active citizenship”

in Jackie Baillie's motion and on the increasing number of elderly people in society, of which the minister will be well aware. A few statistics, produced by Age Concern, might be useful. In 1997, the population of Scotland was some 5 million plus; that is a falling population. Of that number, more than 1 million were aged over 60; nearly 400,000 of them were in the 75-plus age group and 80,000 were in the 85-plus age group. Those figures are set to rise—by 2016 21 per cent of our population will be over 75. In Scotland now, we have more people of pensionable age than we have schoolchildren, yet we do not have facilities for many of our older people, who live in poverty, in poor housing, with poor pensions, poor access to transport, health problems and so on.

Like Keith Raffan, I have a shopping list. I want to draw the minister's attention to Broomhill day centre at Penicuik. I hope that the deputy minister will listen to this example, as the establishment does not cost much. The centre was set up 16 years ago, at which time it operated one day a week as a day centre for the frail and elderly. Now, the centre operates five days a week and has places for 85 individuals in Penicuik and its environs, 25 per cent of whom suffer from varying

degrees of dementia, and 75 per cent of whom are simply physically frail.

In 1997-98, the centre got £47,950 from the social work department and £10,250 from a one-off health grant. It had to grub around to get another £12,000 from trusts. The centre managed to raise £70,150 in total and expended only £72,000 in running costs, which is peanuts. It works out at a cost per individual for day respite care of £85—that is all. However, it is money well spent, not just for the taxpayer, but in terms of the human happiness brought by keeping people in their community.

The centre also provides day relief for the carers who are behind every one of the people who use the centre and who might have fallen into ill health themselves were it not for the simple respite care that the centre provides, along with counselling and the opportunity to meet other carers.

However, the centre has to grub around for money again this year and does not even have a health grant available to it. I therefore welcome the three-year programme of funding, but I want something more.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will the member wind up now, please?

Christine Grahame: I have two short questions for the minister. Will she address the funding problems of that day centre, which has such low demands? Furthermore, will she consider the wider matter of statutory rights to funding for day care centres?

15:57

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): First, I must declare an interest. I am still actively involved in volunteering and the voluntary sector, as I am sure many people here are. Until October, I am also convener of the Council of Voluntary Service Scotland. I hope that members will forgive me if I mention some issues relating to the CVS.

I thank Jackie Baillie for introducing this motion on the voluntary sector. It is like a breath of fresh air to be talking about the voluntary sector and about partnership. I agree with Phil Gallie that the voluntary sector has flourished in Scotland, but sometimes that was in spite of the Conservative Government, rather than because of it.

Jackie talked about the number of people who are employed in the voluntary sector—60,000. There are 27,000 charities in Scotland and 40,000 voluntary organisations, which makes it a big sector. Eighty-six per cent of voluntary organisations are local organisations, run and managed by local people working at grass-roots level. That is an important point.

In the field of social inclusion, umbrella organisations such as the Council of Voluntary Service can get to the part that others cannot reach—they have the Heineken effect, if members will excuse me for referring to the commercial. Such organisations can get to communities, because the people who are involved in them live in the communities. That is why such organisations are valuable. The same is true in rural areas.

Voluntary organisations work across the spectrum. They are not just about meals on wheels, although that is important, but about social care and development, education, culture and recreation, economic development and ensuring a strong input into the social economy, and children and young people. Members have been talking about their areas, so I will tell members about a success story in mine.

Yogi's Sobar is a non-alcohol bar run by and for young people. Members could try to tell those young people about the voluntary sector or talk to them about politics, but they would be given a hard time. Those youngsters cannot be flannelled; they know where they are going. That is the kind of project that we should support—projects that are not just about doing good things for poor people, but about encouraging people to become involved.

The voluntary sector is also involved in health and employment. It has played a key role in the new deal in Scotland and has probably performed better than everyone else in the United Kingdom. The sector is also involved in the environment and community development. I could go on, but I know that I have only four minutes.

Scotland should be proud of its voluntary sector, but it is not a cheap option. The attitude cannot be, "We will run it on the cheap with volunteers and that will be okay." The sector must be supported and valued.

Cathy Jamieson is right: voluntary organisations have struggled over the years, not only to deliver a professional service, but to raise the resources to enable them to do so. As any voluntary sector worker will say, it is the only sector where workers have got to go out and raise the money for their own wages.

If workers do not get paid in March, that is because there is not enough money in the budget. We need to do something about that and that is why I welcome this motion and the minister's commitment to a strong infrastructure for the voluntary sector in Scotland. We should value and recognise the voluntary sector as partners in policy making and in our work.

I hear what the minister says about the compact and that we have to start at the very beginning

with it. The compact in Scotland was the result of a partnership between the voluntary sector and the Government. It was not a document that people agreed bits and pieces of—every line and every phrase was agreed in partnership. It is up to us and to the voluntary sector to ensure that the compact is monitored. I hope, Jackie, that it will come back to the Parliament to be reviewed.

We welcome this debate and I look forward to working with the voluntary sector in Scotland in the future.

16:01

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): There are many commendable voluntary groups and bodies in the Highlands and Islands, but in respect of the geography and topography of the area, there are two that stand out in importance. We have many beautiful but dangerous mountains and miles of equally beautiful and dangerous coastline that are visited by thousands of people.

Luckily, we have the mountain rescue squads and the lifeboats. Both of those excellent organisations are totally supported by the public's voluntary contributions and they are fiercely independent. They not only save many lives but also save us, the general public, an enormous and unquantifiable sum of money each year. In the '70s, the then Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, asked a lifeboat convener what it cost to fund the lifeboats. The reply was £17 million, to which Jim said that it would cost 10 times more if the service was run by the Government. Perhaps he exaggerated, but there is no reason to suppose that the equation has changed much. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution funding requirement, which today is £70 million, represents a far greater figure in financial savings to our people.

The lifeboats are supported entirely by the public; they have no help, financial or otherwise, from the Government, so no strings are attached. There is partnership, in that the lifeboats work closely with paid civil servants, such as coastguards, who normally alert them to casualties, and the other rescue services. Occasionally, RNLI research has been useful to the Royal Navy.

There are 250 lifeboat stations, of which 45 are in Scotland. All are voluntary with one paid man per boat, who is usually the mechanic or coxswain. The new fast boats, which do 25 knots, can operate out to 50 miles and co-operate with the helicopters. The operational side is run from the headquarters in Poole, but there are operational and technical staff in Scotland who work with stations independently and keep in touch with headquarters.

The present chief of operations was trained in Scotland. The make-up of crews varies greatly nowadays. For example, my local station in Oban, Argyll, has a master mariner as cox and a lawyer, a doctor, a cook, a shopkeeper and a fisherman as crew—people from all walks of life who take great pride in being a cog in this inspiring network.

The fund-raising headquarters is in Edinburgh and Scotland has the best per capita fund-raising record in the UK. There are hundreds of large and small fund-raising organisations, both coastal and inland. The cox decides whether the lifeboat sails; we must remember that when ordinary craft come in to shelter, the lifeboat is going out. The RNLI saves more than 3,000 lives each year—sometimes at the cost of the lives of the crew. In 1971, the Longhope disaster occurred, in which nearly the whole crew perished. Despite Longhope being a tiny community, a replacement crew was in place within 24 hours. A year later, there was another lifeboat disaster in Fraserburgh—again, that did not deter recruitment.

The Lochaber mountain rescue squad is the largest of the squads and, like the lifeboats, is entirely funded by the public. It costs £60,000 per annum to run and has so far undertaken 64 rescues this year—some of which were multiple rescues, not just individual rescues—and that figure is likely to rise to 90 rescues per annum. The squad works in partnership with the police, who supply it with some £1,500 of equipment per annum. It has access to the Sea King helicopters and services at Lossiemouth and HMS Gannet station in Prestwick. Each year, the squad raises some £20,000 from the highly popular Glen Nevis river race, which is also a great tourist attraction.

Like the lifeboat people, the mountain rescue teams work in terrifying conditions for no money because they want to help others. Those wonderful organisations, financed by the public, save many lives and an enormous amount of money. They also provide the space for individual and team acts of bravery and self-sacrifice which inspire pride in people and in communities.

With the millennium approaching, it is probable that there will be more exuberant, ill-equipped amateur mountaineers, and possibly more would-be Sinbads putting to sea in unsuitable craft. It would be helpful if the Executive could offset problems by putting out information through television, leaflets and information centres, warning of the considerable dangers of climbing and sailing in the Highlands and Islands in winter and during the millennium.

16:06

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I welcome the motion, which recognises the

importance of the voluntary sector in carrying forward key elements of the Government's social inclusion strategy. I also welcome the consensus that there appears to be around the motion. The minister's proposals, in particular the establishment of the voluntary issues unit, will significantly advance the sector's capability to deliver its part of the agenda. I also welcome the earlier commitment to look at the Council of Voluntary Service and to take that issue forward.

As a member of the Kemp commission, I spent a considerable amount of time between 1995 and 1997 listening to people who work in the voluntary sector, to its clients and to organisations that commission services from the sector. The commission talked to people about their achievements, their concerns and their aspirations. I was impressed by the sheer scope and range of voluntary sector organisations, the efficiency of both paid and voluntary staff and the capacity of the sector to innovate and respond to the needs it seeks to meet.

At the time of the Kemp commission's work, the key challenge facing the voluntary sector in Scotland was dealing with the disruption caused by local government reorganisation. That disruption was the fault not of local government, but of the unwanted reorganisation imposed by central Government. It created a huge crisis for the voluntary sector—in many ways more acute than that for local government. There was a crisis in funding, and one caused by divergent policy requirements as the new authorities found their feet.

It was abundantly clear to Kemp commission members that there was a pressing need for a new set of arrangements between local government, central Government and the voluntary sector. We envisaged a new type of partnership arrangement that would allow the sector to manage its activities better, while maintaining its strengths, among the most important of which are its flexibility and diversity. The commitments that the minister is bringing forward today go a long way toward making that partnership a reality.

Lloyd Quinan said that he has been looking at this issue for only a few months and that he hopes local government will also commit to funding organisations for a three-year period. I must tell him that local government has been well in advance of central Government in building towards a three-year commitment. COSLA and the voluntary sector began to develop their positive partnership strategy in 1995 and earlier this year COSLA's voluntary sector task group, which is chaired by Mike McCarron, issued guidance to councils on the funding of voluntary organisations, which incorporated advice on a shift to three-year

funding.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Does Mr McNulty agree, however, that although the intention exists and people are proposing policy practice notes or whatever, the reality is—as Cathy Jamieson so eloquently said—that most voluntary organisations have to cope with one-year funding? That causes great administrative problems and anxiety, and increases costs.

Des McNulty: I agree that the situation in the past has been unsatisfactory. We now want to change it. Today's commitments will go a great way towards that. Including the urban programme, voluntary organisations currently get almost £60 million in direct funding from central Government. They get £110 million from local government and approximately £280 million from non-departmental public bodies, such as health boards, local enterprise companies, Scottish Homes and a host of other organisations.

If we are moving towards a three-year funding arrangement, we should be looking at it across the range of Government activities. I hope that the minister will encourage her ministerial colleagues to adopt that approach across the budgets for which they are responsible. That could be an effective and cost-neutral way of boosting the voluntary sector's capability to contribute towards meeting the objectives and targets that the Government has set in its partnership document.

It is crucial that we examine the situation in a holistic and rounded way. One of the great things about the voluntary sector is the multiplier effect of its work. Through individual giving, £320 million comes into the voluntary sector, and money is raised through other activities such as commercial activity.

Significantly greater services are delivered by the voluntary service, compared with the public sector, for a given amount of money. That is why the voluntary sector is cost-effective.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Wind up now, please.

Des McNulty: I will wind up in a second.

The voluntary sector also involves people. If social inclusion is to mean anything, the direct participation of those who work for voluntary organisations and other people is vital to the delivery of services.

I welcome the commitment to examine the level of volunteering in the older industrial areas where volunteering is not as common as it is in more prosperous areas.

I might be unique—although Jackie Baillie might be in a similar situation—in having a relatively prosperous area and an older industrial area in my

constituency. I would like to see parity in terms of voluntary sector activity in those areas.

There is much that we can do and I urge the minister to examine the possibility of simplifying the requirements on voluntary organisations in accessing funding. It would be great if we were able to simplify that process and make it more transparent.

In conclusion, the Kemp commission recognised the need to revise charity law. The commitment to do that, which was made by the Government prior to the election, must be honoured. I hope that that will happen in due course.

16:11

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The number of members who have experience in the voluntary sector is one of the unsung glories of the Scottish Parliament. That experience has been shown in the excellent debate that we have had today, and particularly in the speech made by Cathy Jamieson.

We should also welcome the fact that we have a minister who spoke with knowledge and commitment when giving her guarantees and assurances to us today, and who has a background in the voluntary sector.

The support for the voluntary sector in everything that has been said today is welcome. My first point is about the independence of the voluntary sector. It is—and should be—genuinely independent, with its own objectives, ethos and character.

Although I support the Scottish Executive, I would like to state clearly that the voluntary sector's main job is not to deliver the Labour and Liberal Democrat partnership's programme for government. Its main job is to advance its own plural and diverse objectives to fulfil a series of aims—which will contribute to the rich variety in society—regardless of whether they fit in with the overall programme of the Scottish Executive.

Those aims can be the provision of independent and impartial advice from citizens advice bureaux, fighting the cause of the homeless through Shelter, or environmental interests being served by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which has a larger membership than all our political parties put together.

That is not to say that co-operation between the voluntary sector and central and local government is not crucial. Of course it is, and there are myriad partnerships to prove it. Many of them are essential agencies in achieving the Executive's objectives. The partnership between Government and the voluntary sector should be one of equals. Core funding for the sector should be more

assured and should take less time to access than it has in the past. I welcome the three-year commitment of the Executive.

I used to chair Rutherglen and Cambuslang citizens advice bureau. We spent a great deal of time trying to access and secure funding. When I multiply that time by the number of CABs in Scotland and by the number of organisations in the voluntary sector, it becomes clear that the time spent in that process is out of proportion to the paltry sums of money involved.

We must find ways to remove the burden of red tape from volunteers' shoulders to allow them to get on with their jobs. Donald Gorrie talked about the need for bumf-busting committees, which would be important in getting rid of the hoops through which people must jump to get funding.

My next point is connected: we must reinforce successful projects. It is all very well to set up new projects, but it is at least as important to retain the mechanisms of existing projects and to keep them going. It is easier to do that than to start a new structure from scratch, just as it is easier to continue with an existing customer base in private business than to start a new one.

In Easterhouse, there are no fewer than 298 voluntary groups. There is an almighty furore over plans to develop the new social inclusion partnership arrangements in Easterhouse—a reasonable objective in itself, but one that seems to be ignoring or sidelining the role of the existing voluntary organisations—and to wind up the successful Greater Easterhouse Council of Voluntary Organisation, which was regarded as a prototype in its field. We must be careful that we do not throw the baby out with the bath water when we reorganise structures like that.

Let us ensure that, as well as funding, supporting and recognising the independence of the voluntary sector, we keep our doors open to the ideas that that sector has to offer. The 28,000 recognised charities—and many beyond them that are not formally recognised—have a wealth of experience and suggestions to offer, which this Parliament must take on board. Let us keep the doors of our organisation open to ensure that that experience is used effectively in the policy development mechanism.

16:16

Mr George Reid (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On days such as this, I feel that I am in the chamber not only as George Reid, SNP, but as George Reid, CSG. When the consultative steering group put together the building blocks for this Parliament, we acknowledged with gratitude the debt that we owed Scotland's voluntary sector. During the long years when we had a Government

imposed on us for which we had not voted, the voluntary sector was a light in the darkness, pointing the way to a Scottish legislature that would do things differently.

Now that we have our Parliament, there are those who say that the way in which we proceed in the future will be determined by two major fault lines: unionism versus nationalism and left versus right versus the third way. However, there is another fault line that is of great importance to the voluntary sector and the sort of society that we are going to build. It is the fine line between Government and governance; how this Parliament and the Executive tap into the expertise of civic Scotland and how our voluntary organisations can contribute—in the words of the compact—

“their experience and ideas to the development and implementation of public policy”.

At the Scottish general election, all parties supported the principle of social partnership. Now we are moving from principle to practice to small print. There may be ministers and ministers-in-waiting who are anxious to imprint the firm stamp of personal authority on decisions, but who are not too enthusiastic about an extended series of consultation procedures or having to listen to disparate voices. Civil servants are also distinctly underwhelmed by the prospect of other bodies having a role in briefing and informing those who are involved in Scottish decision making.

None the less, partnership and participation remain basic building blocks of this Parliament. The CSG took the absolutely clear view that the Executive and the Parliament are no longer to be the sole source of policy development and formulation. Particularly in the wicked bits of governance that fall between departmental divisions, the real experts who have hands-on experience are probably to be found among Scotland's 900,000 volunteers and their 60,000 professional staff.

As an MSP/CSG, I have been banging on doors about that for quite a long time. Henry is all in favour of it, but has moved on. Jim is totally committed, but has a lot on his plate. Jackie has responsibility for the voluntary sector and is doing a remarkably good job, but she is not a minister but a deputy. Wendy, who can speak the language of social inclusion, governance and marginalisation rather better than most of us, has got in her pre-emptive hit and headlines, quite rightly, on citizens juries and panels. I warmly congratulate her on that, and wish her well. However, the buck stops with Jack—who is not here, and who must now be wondering how he is going to maximise the message.

A couple of weekends ago, at the Stirling assembly, Canon Kenyon Wright gave Jack an

ultimatum: Jack, he said, must initiate the civic forum by St Andrew's day. Or what? Esther Robertson and I argued that, more important than doing things now, we should do things right. I hope that the ministers will agree that this is an area in which process—the multiple entry points to decision making for civic Scotland—is probably more important than structure. None the less, Canon Wright was echoing widespread concerns. I would be grateful, therefore, if the minister, in summing up, would address a few basic questions.

Can the minister give a firm assurance that the civic forum is coming soon? Can she confirm that it will be adequately funded over three years? Does she agree that the forum should be a gateway to our voluntary organisations, not a gatekeeper that boxes them in? Will she comment on the advice given to Parliament about the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General being able to speak and participate in the Parliament but not vote, and will she address my concern that such arrangements exclude representatives of the voluntary sector from acting as advisers or sitting on committees?

In the spirit of constructive engagement, which I hope will be the hallmark of the SNP in this Parliament, I agree that the Executive has made a good and constructive start in setting out the principles of its engagement with the voluntary sector. To date, however, the arrangements seem a little fragmented, with the details being unveiled according to the commitment and agenda of individual ministers. However, when Wendy winds up, we may get the big picture.

16:21

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I wholeheartedly support Jackie Baillie's motion and I congratulate her on her opening remarks.

The importance and value of the voluntary sector in Scotland was ignored for too long. The benefits of volunteering for both the community and the individual were undervalued; they should not have been. Volunteers benefit by gaining more confidence in themselves, their skills and their abilities; moreover, their job prospects become brighter. In turn, their efforts benefit both the voluntary organisation and the local community as a whole. Lack of motivation, lack of involvement and lack of training and skills are so often the causes of social exclusion, and the promotion of the voluntary sector plays a valuable part in tackling it.

Consultation and dialogue between the Scottish Executive and the voluntary sector is the best way for Scotland to gain even larger benefits from our

volunteers. I know that the Executive is committed to guaranteed independence for voluntary organisations, and those involved in the voluntary sector should be encouraged to feel free to criticise the work of Government, regardless of their sources of funding.

The direct involvement in policy making of people who work in the voluntary sector has obvious benefits, and their unique knowledge should be used to advantage.

The importance of the voluntary sector to the people of Scotland is especially evident in my constituency. The voluntary sector is particularly active in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, where there are more than 200 organisations, most of which are small, with between one and 10 volunteers and with only one or two full-time staff.

One such organisation is the Alpha project, which has been running for more than 30 years. Its aim is to provide practical help and solutions to the everyday problems of people with physical disabilities. Thirteen staff and 10 volunteers supply expert personal care and support and are fully trained to carry out a full range of day care services.

Those who are helped by the Alpha project are individually assessed for their physical and their psychological needs. They derive benefit from the project, but the staff and volunteers also benefit greatly. In July, the Alpha project was the first organisation of its kind in Lanarkshire to be given an Investors in People award. That is something of which the people who have been involved over the years are very proud.

The value of the voluntary sector in Scotland, both for the community and for those who work in the sector and gain great benefits from it, should not be underestimated. The minister, as has been said, has a background in the voluntary sector and recognises the importance of the sector and of its independence. I am sure that she will promote dialogue and consultation to encourage the sector and to maximise the benefits that it brings to all of us. I wish her luck.

16:24

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I welcome the debate as an explicit recognition of the importance of the voluntary sector to society. I was particularly interested in Jackie's remarks on the geographic spread of voluntary organisations and activities. The chief executive of Annandale and Eskdale Council for Voluntary Service told me that there are 500 voluntary organisations in that area, which contains only about 40,000 people. In some ways, we must welcome such a diversity of organisations but that strength may also be a weakness, as the volunteers and the financial

resources are thinly spread. In many small communities, a core of people are involved in all the organisations, which would not function without them.

I have been struck by the volume of correspondence I have received from a multitude of organisations across Scotland that appear to overlap in their activities. I welcome the minister's suggestion that she would welcome a review into whether there should be fewer but better-focused, better-resourced organisations, which I believe would be in the best interests of the voluntary sector and of society.

I hope that we recognise the complexity of the task of those who work in the voluntary sector. We have heard a lot of praise for volunteers this afternoon but those who manage and co-ordinate them are not given the credit that they deserve. My background is not in voluntary organisations but in business—Wendy will know phrases such as “sweating the matrix” and other such management techniques. When I became a parliamentary candidate and had to work more closely with volunteers than I had been accustomed to, I realised what a challenge their work was, even when people were wanting to help and offer support—it is a complicated and important job.

I am pleased with what has been said about funding. However, many organisations receive Government money from a number of different sources; there may be a better process of distributing funding than for money to come from the local council, central Government, the local enterprise company, the health board and perhaps lottery funding. Money is cascaded down by the Government and comes back together in a single organisation. Are we wasting resources because of the way in which money gets to the end user?

My final point is one that Cathy Jamieson also made. It would be helpful if Jackie had a word in the ear of the transport minister—or perhaps her new deputy who appeared for her today—about transport costs for the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector has to pay fuel duty and in vast rural areas that can be a problem. An example is Dumfries and District Women's Aid, which was mentioned in the domestic violence debate. The organisation can be effective only if it can get out and help people in the remoter parts of the community, but that means that there are fuel costs.

16:29

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I have worked in the private, public and voluntary sectors and that experience has shown me that the voluntary sector—which has also been described

as the third sector or the social economy—is innovative, imaginative, dynamic and flexible.

The voluntary sector is also democratic and accountable in a way that many organisations in other sectors are not. As well as sometimes being a weakness, that is also one of its underlying strengths, because it brings the sector close to the community and to the people who rely on its services. It is significant that, in this debate, many speakers have taken the time to praise the efforts of the countless volunteers throughout Scotland who make such a significant contribution to the quality of life not just of communities but, as important, of individuals. Without those volunteers many people's lives would be severely blighted.

It is important that we begin to talk about the social economy, because the sector is no longer just about volunteering. It is tremendously dynamic and has made a huge economic contribution in countless communities. For example, credit unions—I am a member of one—have made a significant economic contribution.

Housing associations have also made a difference in many communities—we can see the effect that they have had on people's quality of life. Many housing associations have developed beyond being simply housing providers and now provide social care and employment opportunities. I would argue that housing associations have the potential to make a greater contribution to Scottish society than we are asking them to make. I hope that the Executive will look into that closely.

If we are talking about added responsibility, we must also begin to talk about greater accountability. When the social economy and the voluntary sector are asked to take on greater responsibilities and receive more funding, they will have to be accountable, just as local authorities must be accountable. I hope that the Scottish Executive will examine ways of addressing that, not punitively, but positively.

Mr McGrigor: Will the Executive take on board the fact that a lot of the voluntary organisations that are being funded have to pay back a lot of money in VAT? For example, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution is paying back £1.5 million a year. Will the Executive address that matter?

Hugh Henry: That question would be more appropriately addressed to the Executive. I cannot speak on behalf of the Executive.

I was making the point that the issue of accountability must be seen in a positive light. Accountability will strengthen the role of the voluntary sector and enable it to perform its duties with greater security.

I have a warning for those colleagues who raised issues to do with the funding of certain

organisations. We talk about involving the voluntary sector and the social economy in policy making. By all means let us examine how we can do that, but we must remember that we cannot say that this Parliament should not interfere with the rights of local authorities while telling those local authorities how they should engage with voluntary organisations in their areas. Rather than be entirely prescriptive, we should be involved in providing a strategic framework within which local authorities can operate. Similarly, we cannot come to this Parliament with tales of problems in individual organisations that are funded by local authorities and at the same time say that this Parliament should not interfere with the rights of local authorities—we cannot have it both ways.

I have had experience of a range of excellent organisations in my area, such as Renfrewshire Association for Mental Health, One Plus, Unity Enterprise Ltd and various housing associations. Cathy Jamieson is right to raise the issue of Scottish Criminal Record Office checks and vetting. We cannot expect people to perform checks and then ask them to fund those checks. We must do something about that.

I want to know whether the Scottish Executive, through the Minister for Finance, will consider some of the difficulties associated with European funding. We will threaten many organisations if we do not sort that out. Finally, will the minister consider the gaps in funding that may arise between current programmes and subsequent programmes? If we do not deal with that problem, many voluntary organisations will go to the wall.

16:35

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I realise that time is short, so I will be concise. I welcome the fact that the Executive recognises the important role that the voluntary sector plays in Scotland. Thousands of people give their time year after year. Groups would cease to exist without them. I applaud every one of them.

Most people have raised the issue of funding but I will concentrate on the part of the minister's speech in which she stated the Executive's commitment to create a stable—I stress that word—infrastructure. Hugh, like myself, was a councillor in a previous life. He mentioned various groups, but I will not talk about individual groups, as I would be here all day. Some of them were excellent and, unfortunately—Hugh would probably back me up—some of them were not.

As a councillor, I dealt daily with voluntary groups. One thing that they had in common was a lack of stable funding. The organisations receive some grants from the lottery and local councils but those are, at best, sporadic. Some groups survive

month to month, dependent on public donations. I recognise what Jackie said and believe that she will try to make progress, but if we are serious about the voluntary sector's role, we must ensure that the Parliament and local councils provide the infrastructure for dialogue, as Hugh said.

As well as dialogue, those groups need training and funding to enable them to flourish. As George said, they have great expertise in areas in which the Parliament and local councils do not have it. We should be tapping into those voluntary groups and using their expertise. We should encourage an exchange of knowledge. We should not exclude them.

I accept what Jackie said and, when I see the finished product, I am sure that I will be proven right in my belief that she means what she says. I am not saying that we, or local councils, should take over the running of those organisations, as was implied in some speeches. The minister has reiterated that that is not what the compact states. We must co-operate more closely with voluntary groups, to the benefit of both sides. The independent nature of those groups means that they would not want to be tied to officialdom.

By creating meaningful dialogue and co-operation among the authorities and in the communities that the voluntary organisations serve, the voluntary organisations will play their part in the regeneration of our communities. Those organisations work on the ground and see what is needed. Voluntary organisations can push forward an agenda that will ensure fairness for all.

16:39

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): This has been a positive debate, discussing a positive motion. The motion was charmingly presented, if I may say so. It is important to recognise the value of the voluntary sector, which almost every speaker has highlighted. We have heard contributions from all parts of Scotland, which have highlighted what the voluntary sector contributes to their communities. That cannot be a bad thing.

The voluntary sector also provides value for money. When Jackie Baillie has to go to Black Jack McConnell and ask for more money, perhaps the following information will be of some use to her. For example, the voluntary sector spends £1.8 billion per year. Of that, it raises £935 million, with only about £470 million coming from public funds. That, by any standards, is not a bad deal.

It would not be appropriate for me to speak in this debate without paying tribute to the enormous amount of good will that is generated by the voluntary sector and by the more than 40,000 volunteers who give so willingly of their time—some only a few hours, others much more. Those

people commit their time and, in many cases, spend a considerable amount of their money to ensure that their organisations work. That is their special contribution to Scottish civic society. We are very fortunate to have people who are prepared to do that. Anything that we can do to make that contribution more worth while and to encourage a feel-good factor is to be welcomed.

I would like to have seen some aspects of the debate taken a bit further. Despite the undertaking that the minister has given, I am a little concerned that Government may involve itself too deeply. The voluntary sector is, by its very nature, voluntary. As far as possible, it should be detached from Government. While I see where the minister is coming from, we should not become too involved.

Indeed, I would encourage the Government to examine ways in which the voluntary sector could do more. Superficial examination would suggest that housing associations are run in a very positive way, and I wonder whether that could be extended to, for example, old folks homes. The people of an area might set up a management committee to run a home to which the old folk from that community could come. The idea may not be a runner, but it is perhaps worthy of examination.

While Government must remain detached, it must satisfy itself that there is a degree of accountability. Regardless of whether there is to be one-year or three-year funding, we must ensure that we get value for public money when it is invested.

The one reservation that I have about the voluntary sector is that it is not always as focused as it might be. Sometimes too many organisations are attempting to do the same thing. It is difficult to see how that can be changed, because everyone wants to put forward their own case and we would not wish to discourage that. However, we could seek to ensure that funds that are handled by the voluntary sector achieve maximum benefit for all.

I was amused by some of the examples that were cited in the debate, as members sought to promote their pet projects. I was particularly amused when Phil Gallie suggested that the minister consider putting money into the Caledonian Football Club, whose buildings are falling into disrepair. As a Partick Thistle supporter, I could ask the minister to put money into that club, whose players have fallen into disrepair.

The Deputy Minister for Local Government (Mr Frank McAveety): There is not enough money for that.

Bill Aitken: As Mr McAveety says, there is not enough money for that.

Clearly, this has been a positive debate. However, there is much that could have been said about the voluntary sector that has not come out here, because its role is so wide, so deep and so interwoven into the fabric of Scottish society. This is an issue to which we will return in the months and years ahead. Today has been a positive start. As has been indicated, we will not be dividing on this motion. The volume and the quality of the contributions from this chamber are indicative of the fact that the Scottish Parliament is keen to recognise the tremendous achievement of the voluntary sector.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Fiona Hyslop to wind up for the Scottish National party.

16:44

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I, too, welcome the support for the voluntary sector that the Executive has shown and the tributes that have been paid by members from all parties to Scotland's many volunteers, most of whom probably do not think of themselves as volunteers. I understand that Wendy Alexander has volunteered—rather than been press-ganged—to come to the SNP conference tomorrow for a fringe meeting debate. I am sure that she will receive a courteous reception.

This could be a key and defining debate for the Parliament. It is a signal of intent of how we think we will develop and what our relationship with the voluntary sector will be. George Reid made an important point: we have to see how far the Parliament is prepared to go to take on board the consultative steering group's recommendations. The real test will be this debate's follow-through.

Hugh Henry should be aware that the Parliament has not decided its relationship with local government yet. General competency has yet to be agreed, although I appreciate the points that he made.

In this debate, we should look at strategy, the operational aspect and the cultural attitude. The compact has to have analysis and I understand that there will be a debate on that at some point. The issue of the civic forum must be raised again.

We should explore policy-making issues. We are talking about involving professionals from the voluntary sector in the consultation process. However, on Friday, other Lothian MSPs and I were involved in a question-and-answer session with 40 organisations from the voluntary sector. They told us to think about involving the users of the voluntary sector in the consultation process. They pointed out that the Scottish Office had involved professionals in its consultation on HIV policy, but not the sufferers. I hope that progress can be made in that area.

Operationally, we have to address funding. We should recognise that the reason why local authorities are cutting back on voluntary sector funding is cuts in their own funding. In 1996-97, funding dropped from £134 million to £110 million. That is a 20 per cent drop.

I would also like the minister to address the point that was made about police checks. Angus MacKay acknowledged that criminal records checking has to be self-funding. Will the Executive give a commitment that it will meet that expense for the voluntary sector, particularly for children's organisations?

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): Will Fiona Hyslop agree that the problem is not just the financial burden—which the Guide Association reckons at £40,000—but the administrative burden?

Fiona Hyslop: I agree with that. A motion that deals with that has been lodged and I hope that Dr Simpson will support it. Cathy Jamieson touched on the point that if we want front-line services to be met, we cannot have our voluntary sector organisations being tied up with bureaucracy and red tape.

As someone who has come from the private sector, I say to members that, sometimes, best value does not come from competitive tendering but comes from the quality of relationships that have been built up between suppliers of services. Many people who are involved in the sector do not want to speak out because they do not want to bite the hand that feeds them. If providers of core services are in despair because they cannot provide the level of service that they want to because of a lack of funds, we are in a serious situation. We need to look at the social economy—what Des McNulty said on that was important.

The attitude of the debate should be one of respect: health boards should provide rooms for voluntary sector organisations, for example, and the voluntary sector should be represented on the task forces and inquiries that are being set up. It has been suggested that the Government treats the voluntary sector with the same respect as it treats the Confederation of British Industry, but how many members of the Cabinet have included someone from the voluntary sector in their reviews? That is the real test.

We want action in this area and we want it delivered with hard cash and by a positive attitude that can promote creative and innovative thinking. That will happen only in a sector that is confident and at ease with itself. The present climate of public sector funding is in danger of stifling that. We welcome the sentiment of the motion and we recognise the signal of intent but we are impatient for support and action.

16:50

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): This debate has done credit to the Parliament; I am reminded of the debate on violence against women, where the same expertise was shown by members on all sides of the chamber. It is also similar in one other respect—that the press gallery is entirely empty.

As Fiona said, this debate is not just about good intentions. It is about redefining the relationship between the third sector and Government in Scotland. Today is an opportunity not just for recognising the scale of the voluntary effort in Scotland, but for showing our determination, as the first Scottish Parliament in 300 years, to create the conditions in which that sector can flourish. As George Reid said, it is our opportunity to repay a debt of gratitude to people who for many years were a light in the darkness, arguing the case for our existence.

For the Executive and, I believe, for many other people who have spoken in the chamber today, the big idea is that, in future, Scotland's voluntary sector will be not just the key to delivering services, but fundamental to the development of policy. Like Fiona, I want the third sector to have the status in Scotland that the Scottish Trades Union Congress or the Confederation of British Industry has as leading social partners in the new Scotland.

I will deal with the three issues that have come up in the debate: finance; general support for the sector; and why the third sector matters.

Starting with finance, no one can dismiss the sort of pain resulting from annual funding that we have heard about today. The creation of the voluntary issues unit at the heart of the Executive as a champion for the sector means that the mistakes of the past will not be repeated. Commitments have been given today: three-year core funding as the norm; commitment to funding core costs; discussing with local government its relationship to the sector; and the need for single applications so that Cathy Jamieson's successors do not have to fill in 32 forms before they have core funding.

We also need to talk about new exit strategies, which involves mainstreaming provision. What is exciting is that it is possible to build a political commitment in Scotland that says that the partnership with the third sector is real. We are seeing it happen in areas such as child care; it can begin to happen in a number of other areas.

On charity law in Scotland, we will give proper consideration to the work that is being undertaken at Dundee. On Scottish Criminal Record Office checks, everybody knows—post-Dunblane—that it was necessary to look at how we protect

vulnerable groups. We are keeping the issue of charges actively under review.

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): Will Ms Alexander give way?

Ms Alexander: No, let me continue.

Many individual cases have been raised here—it is right that people do that. I will talk about some of the individual cases that I have seen recently. It devalues the stability and responsibility of health boards if I parachute a response in now. Of course members should write to the Scottish Executive if they feel that there is a case on which it has a locus, but, if not, we need to get the agencies responsible to take up the issue and feel a sense of responsibility about how they deal with the sector.

Briefly on finance, I note in passing that because of the Government's management of the economy, we are in a position to increase funding to local government in Scotland by 4.8 per cent this year. That creates a climate that allows some of the things that we have talked about today to happen.

The second issue is about support for the sector in general. Jackie has talked about the measures we are implementing for active citizenship, the giving age and millennium volunteers. We have talked about the infrastructure commitments we need to give, the review of councils for voluntary service and new cash to complete the network of volunteer development agencies. We have talked about the compact—I hope that the reassurances that have been given about the sector's independence reassure members about how we will move forward.

I turn to the issue raised by George Reid, who pointed out some of the difficulties that we have in achieving joined-up government. I want to treat the civic forum with the seriousness that it deserves, so I will not rush to answer every one of his points. He is right that process matters. At the moment, secondees are talking to the Scottish Executive about how we will get the funding arrangements right for the civic forum. If the civic forum is to fulfil its potential, it cannot simply be about the voluntary sector. One reason why it is difficult to get joined-up government right in this area is the sheer ambition of trying to have a civic forum that involves the third sector, the private sector and ways of talking to Government.

The third area is about why all this matters. Why do we have to support the third sector and the social economy? Members have talked about this. Bill Aitken said that it gives better decisions and more efficiency. Other people, including Cathy Peattie, have talked about getting innovation and about getting to the heart of the wickedest problems.

I have seen two examples recently—everybody gets to talk about this in real terms. On Friday, I was at the Renfrewshire Association for Mental Health. It spends almost £1 million in Renfrewshire, but receives less than £100,000 of that from its local health board. Frankly, the range of its activities astonished me. I know that other members could contribute similar anecdotes.

At lunchtime today, I was at the Glasgow lodging house mission. I talked to people who had spent more than 10 years on the streets of Glasgow. Many of them had been in prison and were looking for aftercare. Keith Raffan talked about the voluntary sector's commitment to getting aftercare provision for prisoners right. I say to him that steps are being taken across the Executive, such as the rough sleepers initiative. We will be announcing guidelines on the £14 million of new money that will allow the voluntary sector to contribute to better public policy.

It is appropriate to give a bit of the long-term vision. How do we get to the heart of this matter? I may be controversial here. It is not just about motherhood and apple pie. The third sector matters because it is about community empowerment and about giving people more power over their own lives. One of the ways in which we are doing that is through the social inclusion partnerships. We have said that not only must there be community representatives on every one of those area-based partnerships, but there must be a representative of the voluntary sector. We have said that we need to put £2 million into letting community representatives have more influence over the decisions that are taken in their name. We have talked about people's panels and people's juries.

Members will know that I also have responsibility for housing. We are going to put more than £300 million into new housing partnerships. That proposal is about community ownership and about putting communities and voluntary effort at the heart of how we govern our communities. It is about trusting people to make decisions about their lives. I hope that when we consider that proposal, it will be seen in that light.

This debate has been about the new politics. Members should work here with us to make that new politics a reality, and out there in partnership with the third sector, which will be our best ally in that.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business on the programme is consideration of other Parliamentary Bureau motions. I am glad to say that there is none, so we will move on to decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are three questions that will have to be put as a result of today's business. Before that happens, I will make an announcement about the voting system. As members noticed yesterday—I should have announced it yesterday—there has been a small change to the electronic voting consoles. From now on, when the voting period begins, the red "vote now" light will begin to flash. It will stop flashing when the member presses the button to record their vote. This change will allow members to confirm that their vote has definitely been registered—until now we have not had that facility. I should point out that members will still be able to change their vote, within the voting period, while the "vote now" button remains illuminated.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-163.1, in the name of Phil Gallie, which seeks to amend motion S1M-163, in the name of Angus MacKay, on crime prevention, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: In that case, there will be a division. Those who support Mr Gallie's amendment should vote yes.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

Ferguson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result is as follows:
 For 17, Against 57, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S1M-163, in the name of Angus MacKay, on crime prevention, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the continuing need to work together for a safer Scotland and acknowledges that the formation of powerful yet practical community safety partnerships, as promoted by the Scottish Executive, provides the means of sustained involvement from all members of our communities and the agencies which serve those communities.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S1M-165, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the voluntary sector, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's recognition of the important role of the voluntary sector in Scottish society through the contribution it makes to economic prosperity, promoting social inclusion and encouraging active citizenship; endorses the Executive's commitment to create a stable infrastructure in which the voluntary sector can flourish, and welcomes the firm intention to work in partnership with the sector in delivering the Programme for Government.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time and, as there is no members' business tonight, I close the meeting.

Meeting closed at 17:01.

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