

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Wednesday 15 November 2000  
(*Afternoon*)

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13 November 2000

## Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 15 November 2000

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:31*]

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Today's time for reflection will be led by Christine Davis, from the Society of Friends.

**Christine Davis (Society of Friends):** It is good to be here with you all, a Friend among friends.

In thinking and praying in preparation for today, I have remembered frequently the life and work of William Penn, the Quaker who established the constitution and unicameral Assembly of Pennsylvania. I find that I can do no better than share with you some of William Penn's thoughts and writings. As a Quaker, I am not frightened of silence. Penn described true silence as being

"to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment."

I will read two other short extracts from Penn's writing and follow each with a short silence, finally adding a few concluding words. So let us share together reflections with William Penn:

"True godliness don't turn people out of the world but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavours to mend it: not hide their candle under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick."

"Christians should keep the helm and guide the vessel to its port; not meanly steal out at the stern of the world and leave those that are in it without a pilot to be driven by the fury of evil times upon the rock or sand of ruin."

[*Silence.*]

"A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it . . . We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by love and information. And yet we could hurt no man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: for if men did once see we love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the laurel."

[*Silence.*]

Penn wrote about others:

"They were changed themselves before they went about to change others."

I pray that, as we use the Parliament to change Scotland, we are changed ourselves and learn the hardest lesson of all: to love one another.

## Water and Sewerage Charges

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The first item of business is a statement by Mr Sam Galbraith on water and sewerage charges. There will be questions at the end of the statement and therefore no interventions during it.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance. During the drug courts debate on 2 November, you said on the issue of matters appearing in the press before we hear about them in the chamber:

"We do not expect to read in the newspapers what will be said in Parliament—we expect to read what has been said . . . I take the issue seriously. If we allow the situation to continue, it will damage Parliament".—[*Official Report*, 2 November 2000; Vol 8, c 1259-60.]

I draw your attention to the fact that in today's *Edinburgh Evening News* there is a prelude to the statement that is about to be made in the chamber. I am aware that the item was carried by the BBC this morning and I have in my hand a copy of a press release that was issued by the Executive at 12.36 pm. In view of your earlier rulings, I would be grateful if you would investigate this matter, make a ruling on it and do what you can to stamp out this practice. What is the point of paying a ministerial salary if the Executive can go straight to the press instead of being answerable to the Parliament?

**The Presiding Officer:** If you let me have copies of the article and press release, I will certainly investigate the matter.

14:36

**The Minister for Environment, Sport and Culture (Mr Sam Galbraith):** Earlier this year, Sarah Boyack announced that the Executive would look at ways of helping those on lower incomes to deal with increases in water and sewerage charges. That announcement reflected our concern about the impact of the increases on vulnerable groups in the community.

The water and sewerage service has suffered from a serious lack of investment for many years. To improve the quality of our water and to fulfil our EU obligations on both water and sewerage, an investment of at least £1.8 billion is required. That has resulted in increased charges.

Although the increases have undoubtedly been unwelcome, I am not aware of any respectable arguments against the investment as such. There is general agreement that our water and sewerage infrastructure needs to be put on a sustainable footing for the long term. Everyone benefits from the investment. As customers, we get higher-

quality drinking water and less risk of interrupted services from burst mains and collapsed sewers. We also benefit from a cleaner, safer environment, in which waste water is properly treated and disposed of rather than being allowed to foul our rivers, beaches and coastal waters.

For most of us, the charges represent a fairly small item of expenditure in our domestic budgets. For a family on average income, the combined water and sewerage charge amounts to about 1 per cent of weekly household expenditure. However, the proportion is higher for those on lower incomes, and that is why the arrangement linking the water charges to council tax bands is important. That link means that those living in lower-banded properties pay less than those in higher-banded properties. Thus, a band A property will pay only one third of what a band H property pays and only two thirds of what a band D property pays.

About 85 per cent of those receiving council tax benefit live in band A or B properties. By definition, those are lower-income households. As a result of the link, they already pay reasonable charges for the services that they receive. Band A households in the west and east of Scotland water areas pay less than £3 a week for those services. On top of that, 25 per cent discounts are given for single-adult occupancy, in line with the council tax discounts. That is further assistance, delivering even lower charges for some of the most vulnerable, including single pensioners and single-parent families. For example, the charge for single-adult properties in band A in the east and west areas is less than £2.20 a week.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Will the minister give way?

**Mr Galbraith:** No, I am making a statement.

**The Presiding Officer:** There should be no interventions during a statement.

**Mr Galbraith:** Those figures illustrate the strengths of the current arrangements in protecting most lower-income households from the worst of recent increases. However, the arrangements provide less assistance to two groups of lower-income households.

First, we must consider those who live in the areas served by the North of Scotland Water Authority. The challenges facing that authority in upgrading its infrastructure and serving a wide and sparsely populated area are well known and are reflected in charges that are higher than those elsewhere in Scotland. Although it is worth pointing out that the charges are by no means the highest in the UK, the fact remains that households in band A properties in the north pay about £50 a year more than those in band A properties elsewhere in Scotland. For those in

higher-banded properties, the difference and the impact of increases are even greater. We recognise that the position in the north is different and needs to be addressed.

The second category covers people on lower incomes in higher-banded properties across Scotland. For them, charge increases are obviously a greater burden than for people in similar circumstances in lower-banded properties. That group is also in a difficult position and needs help.

I am now able to outline our proposals for a scheme to cap the amount paid in water charges by those on council tax benefit. The Executive will fund the scheme at an estimated cost of £24 million over the next three years.

The detail of how the scheme operates will be considered in a consultation exercise that I am launching today. The broad intention is to help those receiving council tax benefit—wherever they live in Scotland—to deal with the transition to increased water charges. The limit on charges for next year will be announced later, but I expect it to be between £180 and £200. That means help to households on lower incomes by guaranteeing that none will pay more than £3.85 a week for water and sewerage services next year.

In seeking to assist those groups, we are keen to deliver help as simply as possible. We do not propose devising a separate means of identifying those who need help. Instead, we will work on the basis that eligibility for council tax benefit—the most widely claimed benefit—is a broad indication of low income and represents a reasonable qualification for benefiting from the cap on charges.

The local authorities are well placed to deliver help. As they already collect water and sewerage charges for the water authorities and administer council tax benefit, they have the systems and the information necessary to administer the scheme. We will be discussing the details of implementation with them as part of the wider consultation exercise. I am confident that we can co-operate in developing a system that delivers help to those who need it and that is cost-effective, straightforward and easy to operate.

We must consider this in the wider context. As I said, specific help to deal with increases in charges can go only so far in helping those on lower incomes. What is required is a more wide-reaching approach to promoting social inclusion—that is what the Executive and the UK Government are working to deliver.

The Executive has announced plans for pensioners' concessionary travel and its scheme to help households install central heating. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is also providing



assistance for working families and pensioners, including the increases to pensions and winter fuel allowances that were recently announced.

The cap on water charges fits into our broader social justice strategy, progress on which we will debate later this afternoon. It is a further measure aimed at delivering help where it is needed. I am sure that the scheme will be welcomed by those who are most affected by rising charges and by those who speak for them, and I commend it to the Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** We now come to questions for the minister. Members who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I warmly welcome today's statement, which was long overdue, from the new Minister for the Environment, Sport and Culture. I am delighted that the Executive has adopted yet another SNP policy. The statement was not so much a ministerial statement as a confession of guilt that the Government has failed low-income households in the past few years, given that water bills in Scotland have risen by more than 200 per cent since Labour came to power. However, better extremely late than never.

The scheme that was outlined in the statement is welcome. It will help the North of Scotland Water Authority, which has been hit particularly badly by rising water bills. However, it appears to members of the SNP that the scheme offers little to water customers in the east and west of Scotland.

Will the minister confirm that householders who live in a band A or band B property in Glasgow and who receive council tax benefit will not benefit from the scheme? Is not it the case that the scheme will treat the symptoms rather than the root of the problem, given that the Government's policy has forced water authorities to raise their income through water charges so that vital investment can be made? Will there be a long-term change to that policy? Will the Labour Government continue to force a tap tax on low-income households in Scotland?

**Mr Galbraith:** I hoped to get a slightly better response, but it was not forthcoming. I was rather disappointed by Richard Lochhead's gurning attitude, but I suppose that we always expect that. My statement contained good news, but the nationalists would not have liked that at all, as they are interested only in bad news.

Richard Lochhead did not ask many questions, but tripped out a collection of soundbites that the SNP's spin-doctors will be able to pass round the press later. However, I will answer his specific question on whether the scheme will help those

living in the east and west of Scotland. Yes, it will—the scheme's benefits will be available to recipients of council tax benefits who live in the east and the west in Scotland, except those who live in band A properties. The scheme will benefit those who live in properties that are in the upper bands, but it is not available for band A properties because people who live in those properties pay well below the cap, which will be set at about £3.85. A single person in a band A property in the west of Scotland pays £2.20; two-person households pay about £2.95. The scheme will benefit vulnerable people throughout Scotland but, in light of the difficulties experienced with a small customer base that covers a large area, it will particularly benefit those who live in the north of Scotland.

The charges were increased because of under-investment over the years, for which we must now pay. The problem is one of short-termism. The coalition looks to the long term—that is what our approach is all about.

**Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con):** I, too, welcome the new Minister for Environment, Sport and Culture to his first statement. I thank him for the advance copy of the statement—such courtesy is always appreciated. I also thank him for the fact that, quite unusually, the consultation paper has been provided before the minister gave his statement.

I have two questions for the minister. From the consultation paper, it appears that the Executive proposes only a transitional scheme, which will finish in 2004. The consultation does not appear to include proposals for the long-term protection of what Mr Galbraith described as the second category of low-income households—those people who live in larger, or higher-band, properties and who have low incomes. Will the minister confirm that that is the case?

Given the minister's recent experience of software issues, what steps has he taken to establish that local authorities will be able to deal with and administer the scheme? He must be aware of the severe dislocation experienced by many local authorities in recent years when they have combined council tax benefit and housing benefit payments. Is he absolutely certain that the authorities will be able to deal with the scheme? In particular, how will authorities deal with the artificial cut-off that the cap represents? The Parliament would appreciate some cast-iron guarantees that the scheme will work.

**Mr Galbraith:** I thank Mr Tosh for his comments and I am grateful for what he said about providing him with a copy of my statement.

The cap will be decided once we know what the proposed charges are. It is important to set the

cap to make it as administratively sensible as possible, so that question will be answered later. We are confident that councils can deal with the matter, but we have told them that any genuine expenditure resulting from the process will be directly reimbursed by the Executive.

The arrangement is indeed a transitional one. It is for three years and no one has their public expenditure laid down for more than three years. I think that that is a reasonable basis on which to operate. The scheme will deal with all the groups that need to be dealt with: everyone on council tax benefit throughout the whole of the north of Scotland, and those above band A in the east and west of Scotland.

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** I welcome the minister to his new role; it is good to have him. I also welcome whole-heartedly the statement that he has made today and the progress that is being made on the Executive's commitment to alleviating the burden on those who have been hardest hit by the increased water charges. The minister said that he will be discussing the details of implementation with the local authorities. Local authorities, as well as NOSWA customers, have their own financial difficulties to contend with. Will his discussions include the costs to local authorities of implementing the scheme, and will the Executive pick up those costs?

**Mr Galbraith:** That is part of the consultation. I have spoken to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities today to reaffirm that genuine cost increases involved in implementation will be paid for by the Executive.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I welcome what the minister said about targeted support and his recognition that, in the interests of public health, water treatment standards must be improved throughout Scotland. What is the expected size of the average water and sewerage bill after the proposals are introduced and what average saving is anticipated per household?

**Mr Galbraith:** Mr McNulty is right to mention public health; that is what this is all about. Contrary to the myth, Scotland's water is not the most perfect in the world and much has to be done to it. We often say that it comes straight from the mountain to our taps, but that is perhaps the problem—it does not pass through any of the necessary treatment stages in between. We require the investment to deal with that.

The savings for each household will vary, but I can give some examples. In the north of Scotland, for instance, the saving for a band A household might be about £40 a week and the saving for a band D household £100 a week. Average costs also vary. In the west of Scotland, the charge for a

band A household is about £149. In the north of Scotland, it is about £200 and, in the east of Scotland, it is about £151. However, relief will be available. Those are the sort of average costs that will result, with significant savings.

**Bruce Crawford:** I welcome the minister to his new brief and wish him well in his efforts over the next few years. I also thank him for sending me a copy of his statement and the booklet, which I have not yet had a chance to peruse.

The minister said that £24 million would be made available over the next three years to fund the scheme. Can he confirm how much a week will be available in water benefit as a result of the proposals for those who are currently receiving council tax benefit? Some of the figures that have been presented to me suggest that water benefit could be as low as 75p a week for those who also receive council tax benefit. How many households will benefit and how has the figure of £3.85 been calculated? Where did the £24 million come from? Is it new money or has it come from another programme? If it has come from elsewhere, which programme has it come from?

The minister also mentioned his intention to go to consultation, which is laudable. If the consultation process shows that he does not have enough invested, does he have any flexibility or additional resources that he can apply to the scheme, or is the writing already on the wall, leaving the consultation exercise a bit of a sham?

**Mr Galbraith:** The decision has been made that we will make that considerable sum of extra money available. The consultation will be concerned with how that can best be done equitably and fairly and within the mechanics of the process. I would have thought that Bruce Crawford would want to welcome the considerable investment. I know that the Scottish National Party is unhappy because £24 million is a lot of money. However, we should not denigrate the sum.

How much individuals benefit will depend on their council tax band. People in band A other than in the north of Scotland currently pay less than £3.85 a week. Unless there is an increase that takes their payments above that amount, the scheme will not apply to them.

I am sorry to have to tell the member that this is new money and that it is not taken from elsewhere.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I have three questions. First, will the minister confirm whether he is making available £24 million a year or £24 million in total over three years?

**Mr Galbraith:** It is £24 million over three years.

**John Scott:** Secondly, can the minister assure me that businesses, which are currently paying

very high water rates, will not be surcharged to fill the funding gap? Thirdly, in answer to Des McNulty's question a moment ago, the minister said that households would be £40 to £100 a week better off. Did he mean £40 to £100 a year better off?

**Mr Galbraith:** Yes.

**John Scott:** I am sure that the minister will want to clarify that.

**Mr Galbraith:** I thank the member for correcting me. Now the nationalists cannot accuse me of lying and misleading the chamber. They did not notice my mistake, as they come to the chamber with set questions. Never mind.

John Scott asks a very good question about businesses. One of the options was for us to cross-subsidise and to find the extra money from non-domestic charges. That will not happen. As the member knows, the balance between domestic and non-domestic charges is a matter for the water industry commissioner. We do not have a part in deciding that. However, there is an important issue relating to non-domestic organisations that can source water from other areas and thereby reduce their demand. Whatever we decide, it is important that we keep those organisations within the public water system. In the west of Scotland, 40 per cent of all charges are non-domestic. If we were to lose that money, we would be in trouble. It must be protected and we have done everything possible to ensure that it is.

**Tommy Sheridan:** I welcome the minister's statement and the change in the Executive's policy. The former Minister for Finance, Mr McConnell, wrote to me on three occasions denying that we needed a water rebate scheme, and I am glad that the Executive has changed its opinion.

I seek an assurance from the minister that the consultation, if it is to be genuine, will allow the prospect of a change to the decision to exclude band A properties in the city of Glasgow. The average income of people in Glasgow is 21 per cent lower than the income of people in Scotland as a whole, but Glasgow's council tax is 25 per cent higher than the average for Scotland. Most of Glasgow's properties are in bands A and B. Although many people are in receipt of council tax benefit and do not pay council tax, they are struggling to pay their water bills. Can the minister assure me that the decision to exclude band A properties is not fixed?

**Mr Galbraith:** It is a fixed decision because of the level at which we have set the cap. In the west of Scotland, people paying council tax in band A pay less than the amount at which water bills will be capped, so it is not necessary for them to be

included in the scheme. Currently they pay £2.90, or £2.20 if they are single parents. Even with the increases, they will not come close to the cap, so there is no reason for them to be included.

Mr Sheridan says that people in Glasgow have a low average income. That will be reflected in their council tax band. As the member knows, people in higher bands pay significantly more in water charges than those in lower bands. In fact, people in lower bands pay a third of the amount that those in higher bands pay. That is how we will deal with Glasgow's problems—not just through the capping scheme.

**Kate MacLean (Dundee West) (Lab):** As the minister has outlined, the increased charges have had a disproportionately harsh effect on North of Scotland Water Authority customers, particularly in my constituency, where many people live in band A and B properties. Will it be possible to put these arrangements in place for the next financial year? What plans are there for future years? Will money be available for capping water and sewerage charges for people on low incomes?

**Mr Galbraith:** Yes. The north of Scotland has been especially badly hit because it has a low customer base of 600,000. The area is large and costly to deal with. That is why the scheme applies to band A households in the north of Scotland—they already pay about more than £3.85 a week, so further increases would be unacceptable. The scheme will be in place for the next financial year. A supplementary bill may be required a month or two in, but the full benefit will be available in the coming financial year and in the following two.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** Given that the minister has accepted the need for such a scheme, why will it not be made retrospective for those who are suffering now? Can the minister confirm that the water authorities will be placed at the foot of the bonfire of quangos, which the First Minister assured us on Monday that he is about to light? Will the minister categorically deny rumours that are circulating that in internal documents the Labour-Liberal Executive is considering privatisation of the water authorities?

**Mr Galbraith:** If it is not a soundbite, it is a scare story from the SNP.

We are introducing a significant contribution to the payment of water bills for the most vulnerable and all we get is carping, once again. The measure is not retrospective because it is for the next three years. It has taken time for us to introduce this to ensure that we get it right rather than get it quickly.

We have absolutely no plans to privatise water. Let me make that absolutely clear and let us not have any of those rubbish scare stories being

paraded around the country. I am sorry for spoiling the SNP's party.

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** I welcome the minister's comments about, to use his words,

"vulnerable groups in the community."

He talked about the social inclusion agenda, which presumably means access to work. When will the minister address the job losses in the north-east fish processing industry, which are due to the high water and sewerage charges? Does the minister have plans to review the funding formula for the water authorities?

**Mr Galbraith:** That partly relates to the question that Mr Scott asked about charges for non-domestic supply. It is for the water commissioner to get the balance right. We are keen to ensure that the balance is right, because of the importance to us of retaining the non-domestic sector. If we lose the non-domestic sector, the burden will fall on the domestic sector through increased charges. The commissioner is aware of that important matter. He is aware of our views and the views of others; he will take those into account.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** I warmly welcome the minister's statement, which will help low-income households. Does the minister agree that the part played by councils—specifically Stirling Council—in pressing for action and in moving this important matter forward is to be commended?

**Mr Galbraith:** I am always delighted to commend councils, wherever they are and whatever their political persuasion, but I am especially delighted to commend Stirling Council on what it has done. It has done well not only on this matter, but on a range of other issues in which I have been involved.

**Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I thank the minister for his statement. Paragraph 2.1 of the consultation paper, "Affordability of Water and Sewerage Charges", states:

"Over 95% of all households are connected to the public water supply".

However, there is no reference to the 5 per cent that are not connected to the public water supply. The document also states that

"over 90% are connected to the public sewerage system."

Again, no reference is made to the other 10 per cent.

My questions are about the 5 per cent and the 10 per cent. The minister is no doubt aware that, in his constituency of Strathkelvin and Bearsden, a number of people access their water from private supply, have their own sewerage and make use of

septic tanks. A number of them have complained about excessive charges and enormous increases in the charges for emptying septic tanks. Can the minister assure us that, in the further consultation—on which there appears to be little in this consultation paper—he will take into account the 5 per cent of people who do not have a connection to the public water supply and the 10 per cent who have their septic tanks emptied by the water authorities? Will he examine the punitive charges that are being levied, especially on our farmers—who are already in dire straits—for emptying septic tanks?

**Mr Galbraith:** No, that will not be part of the consultation. If Lloyd Quinan wants to make representations to me, I would be only too pleased to hear from him.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** I am delighted to hear the minister announce the action that he will take, which will have a positive impact on low-income households. It is sad but not surprising that the nationalists cannot bring themselves to welcome—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. There must be a question.

**Elaine Smith:** I will turn to my question, to afford others the chance to welcome the minister's statement and to comment on it.

The minister announced the consultation process. Can he say when that process is likely to finish and how it will be carried out, and will he ensure that the consultation is conducted in an inclusive way, along the lines of the consultation that was carried out for the equality strategy?

**Mr Galbraith:** I would like to think that all our consultation exercises are inclusive. The document will be made available to all the interested parties, stakeholders and anyone else who wants to see it. It will also be published on the Executive website. The consultation process will end in January, after which we will make our final decisions when we know the various charges.

**John Young (West of Scotland) (Con):** I, too, welcome some aspects of the minister's statement, but I have two questions. First, in view of the fact that a number of countries have a mandatory requirement for water meters to be installed in households, does the minister envisage that—in the next 10 years, for example—that will become a mandatory requirement from the Executive, whoever the Executive is at the time?

Secondly, although local authorities provide a breakdown of council tax and water rates at the beginning of the financial year, many people have asked whether it would be possible for the water rate to appear on the monthly bill that they pay. At

the moment, they pay one lump sum and most people could not say how much their water rates are.

**Mr Galbraith:** I am grateful to John Young for his support. I know that he has been a great defender of the public water supply and has opposed the Conservative party's plans to privatise the industry. I am sure that local authorities will hear what he says about including water rate figures in monthly bills; Executive officials will deal with that matter. He asked what will happen in 10 years' time, whoever the Executive is. It will most certainly still be a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition—people can have their dreams, but we live in a world of reality. We have no plans for making water meters mandatory. That tends to happen in places where there is a shortage of water, which is not our problem up here.

**Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** I welcome the minister's statement. Can he nail the myth that this is, in some way, an adopted policy of another party? Can he confirm that, in her previous statements to the Parliament, Sarah Boyack said that she was carrying out a review to establish what could be done to protect vulnerable groups in society?

**Mr Galbraith:** I have been in politics for a long time and know that the Opposition adopts a number of poses—some of which I adopted myself, which is how I know about them. One is to say, "It's not enough—gie's mair." Another is to use the word "retrospective", which we heard earlier. Yet another is to say, "It's my policy that you've adopted."

**The Presiding Officer:** On that note, we conclude the statement and questions.

## Social Justice

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We now come to the debate on motion S1M-1345, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on social justice.

15:09

**The Minister for Social Justice (Jackie Baillie):** Today is significant. We are debating Scotland's first annual social justice report. On 22 November 1999, Donald Dewar launched our social justice strategy. In it, he set out our vision of a new Scotland: a more socially just Scotland in which everybody is valued and has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. He committed us to the task of breaking the cycle of deprivation, disadvantage and sheer poverty that affects too many of Scotland's people and places.

That legacy of poverty and disadvantage, which had been inherited from the Tories, demanded that we set ambitious targets such as defeating child poverty within a generation; providing full employment through opportunities for all; and providing dignity and security in old age. It also demanded that we measure what matters by reporting every year to ensure that we are making progress towards delivering the things that make a real difference to people's lives.

One year on from setting up our strategic framework and challenging all of Scotland to join us in defeating child poverty, we have published our first annual social justice report. The report reflects the early outcomes of our actions and our commitment to creating a fairer Scotland. Under Henry McLeish's leadership, we will turn that vision and strategy into action and reality.

For the first time, Scotland has a means of ensuring that deprivation will no longer exist as a way of life for any child, family or older person. We have already started to turn the strategy into action by putting social justice at the heart of our spending plans. There are no quick fixes in this fight and we are passionate for change—the right change that lasts and brings a difference, not the soundbites and empty promises that seem to emanate from other parties in the chamber.

The real significance of Monday's publication is that it shows where we are making progress; where we need to make faster progress; and where we still need to focus our attention to tackle deep-seated, persistent poverty.

No one should doubt the size of the challenge, nor our enthusiasm for taking it on. In a short space of time, 70,000 children have been lifted out of poverty; unemployment is down to its lowest level for a generation; youth unemployment has

been reduced by a staggering 70 per cent; and 75,000 new jobs have been created in Scotland. As Sam Galbraith's announcement has just demonstrated, through our £24 million proposals for relief of water and sewerage charges for many on low incomes, we are working to join up our policies and help those who are most in need.

That will help further to reduce poverty among pensioners and will build on the £350 million package that we have announced to tackle fuel poverty and on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's very welcome additional commitment to pensioners. The basic pension increase alone will be worth £3.6 million a week to Scotland's 900,000 pensioners, which means an extra £187 million in total in the first year. In addition, 185,000 Scottish pensioners will benefit from the increased minimum income guarantee.

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** Obviously, an increase in pensions is to be welcomed, but does the minister recognise that pensioners across Scotland are demanding that the Government should restore the link with earnings, which would give them the rights and dignity that they want?

Secondly, on the £350 million for the central heating initiative, I spoke at a fuel poverty conference on Friday and people had grave concerns about where that money was coming from and where it was going. The £350 million figure has been trumpeted throughout the Executive's documents, but its budget can account for only £120 million. Will the minister take this opportunity to explain where the missing millions are for Scotland's pensioners?

**Jackie Baillie:** Frankly, I would have thought that after the numerous parliamentary questions that Fiona Hyslop has lodged, she would have been able to piece together that information.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I have had no answers.

**Jackie Baillie:** Well, I have certainly signed off those answers.

We are serious about our commitment to pensioners. The issue is not about missing millions, but about providing pensioners with warm, decent, affordable housing and central heating and a good quality of life. I had hoped that the SNP would welcome those measures.

The report plays a groundbreaking and powerful role, in that we now know that, despite our progress, there are nearly one in three children in poverty; one in five households where no one has employment; and neighbourhoods where inequalities in health and services continue to blight people's lives. That is a scandal; it is a shocking waste of potential that the Executive cannot, and will not, tolerate.

Through our strategy, which brings focus, and

through our measurements, which provide the facts that no one knew before, we can turn Scotland's poverty legacy round. We must turn it round for future generations of Scottish children. No longer will a child be born into, or live or die in, poverty. That is our mission.

We now have a detailed picture of the things that matter. We have detailed information on the background of students so that we can track whether our schools, colleges and universities are working to increase opportunities for all and not just for the few.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** The minister says that she has the details. Will she outline what she considers to be the poverty threshold—the annual monetary sum—above which she wants to raise people?

**Jackie Baillie:** We measure poverty using three statistics, all of which were recommended by the European Statistical Programme Committee, which enable comparisons to be made across the board. The first measure is 50 per cent of median income, which works out at £116 a week. The main measure on which we base our findings is 60 per cent of median income, or £139 a week for a couple without children and £205 a week for a couple with two children aged between five and 11—if the detail is wrong, I will be happy to come back to the member. The third measure is 70 per cent of median income. We examine a basket of measures; we believe that that is important to ensure that we do not miss anything. I hope that the member welcomes that.

We also have details on other important issues such as how the worst areas of unemployment compare with the average, so that we can track whether our policies on work are reaching into the most disadvantaged communities, and on whether the combination of police services and safety design makes our older people feel more secure in their homes and communities. There has been progress, but not yet enough. We need to drive social justice forward.

We recognise that it takes time for programmes to have an effect and that data lags mean that much of our work has yet to be reflected in the data in the report. For example, the UK Government's national minimum wage and the working families tax credit were both introduced after the income data in the report were collected. The data on exclusions and truancy from schools date from before our welcome initiatives on alternatives to exclusion and home-school links.

In addition, the data in the report do not reflect the outcome of the recent spending review, which was significant because we put social justice at the heart of our spending plans for the next three years. We have committed an extra £6 billion

better to target inequalities. Spending on health will increase by 15 per cent, on education by 17 per cent and on social justice and housing by 20 per cent. Our spending on enterprise, transport, justice and rural development will contribute directly to our social justice targets and milestones.

Those substantial increases in investment in social justice include investment in some of our most challenging milestones, such as action on drugs, on excluded young people and on tackling rough sleeping and homelessness. Parliament will be aware that I announced an extra £12.5 million last week to sort out Glasgow's hostel problems and that we have already allocated £5 million this year to tackle the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Other programmes will start to have an effect. We are building on the early success of the sure start Scotland programme to provide early care and family support for vulnerable children under the age of three. We are extending free part-time nursery places to all three-year-olds. We are promoting health improvement for children by funding the provision of fruit for infants and children at school. In addition, we are investing record sums in education, reducing class sizes and appointing 5,000 extra classroom assistants.

We faced massive data gaps when we embarked on the exercise. Unsurprisingly, we inherited hardly any information about poverty, income or inequality in Scotland. Those subjects clearly did not matter to previous Administrations. We are filling those gaps, one of which is the need to improve the understanding of rural poverty in Scotland. Ross Finnie has set up a working group to consider that matter. In the meantime, we are keen to encourage qualitative as well as quantitative debate and have included in the report a number of independent articles from distinguished academics to develop our thinking. The opinions expressed in those articles are those of the authors and not of the Executive, but I hope that members agree that the themes of rural poverty, participative methods for measuring poverty and the role of services in disadvantaged areas are topical and substantive. I hope that all members will welcome those additions to our debate.

The union with the rest of the UK gives us the economic strength and stability to make record resource commitments to progress social justice in the next three years. However, we have to use the resources of the union in partnership with communities. Tackling social justice requires a joined-up approach.

**Fiona Hyslop:** One of our problems with the joined-up approach that is the union between the Scottish Parliament and Westminster is that those

Parliaments do not always act in sync. Housing benefit is a classic example: the policy is controlled in Westminster, but operated in Scotland. Furthermore, if the Tories had their way, Scottish MPs at Westminster would be unable to vote on the housing green paper for England and Wales that will include housing benefit proposals that will operate in this country. That is a classic example of joined-up government failing to work properly. If the Scottish Parliament controlled both housing policy and housing benefit, we would have a much more co-ordinated and joined-up approach.

**Jackie Baillie:** I do not know how much more joined up it is possible to get. We are investing £6 billion extra on issues that matter, such as working together to tackle child poverty, achieving full employment, and providing dignity and security in old age. Those are the joins that matter and that will make a difference to the lives of people in Scotland.

I am conscious of time, so I will finish by confirming that our commitment to tackling poverty in Scotland is backed by resources. On Monday, the First Minister, Henry McLeish, announced the £70 million children's change fund as a key part of our strategy for tackling child poverty and deprivation. The fund will be established to support integrated services and new approaches for the most vulnerable children and young people, thereby improving their life chances and preventing them from falling prey to exclusion. It will bring much-needed extra focus to our support for children who are in need. By pooling resources from the education department, the health department and the justice department, we will be making available more than £70 million to resource the fund. Jack McConnell will take the lead and will consult the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, health boards and the voluntary sector about how the fund is administered and linked in with other initiatives.

It is right that we focus on the care and well-being of children. We are building a future for our children and a future for us—a future where our children will not live in poverty, and where we have confident and successful children in every part of Scotland.

We are starting to make progress in turning round the deeply damaging legacy of poverty that we inherited. The first annual report, containing our targets and our milestones, is our means of tracking progress year by year. It is a measure of the failure of our predecessors that, although we have achieved a lot, there is still so much to do. We are targeting our resources on disadvantage and we are working with partners in local government, voluntary organisations, the business community and communities across Scotland. We

are putting in place the programmes and policies that will end child poverty in Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Executive's publication of the *Social Justice Annual Report 2000*; notes the progress which is being made in tackling poverty and social exclusion, and reaffirms its commitment to creating a fairer society in Scotland, where everyone matters.

15:25

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** I welcome the principle of publishing a social justice annual report in Scotland, but I am seriously concerned about the process, the practice and the politics. The debate that we are having today and the report that is in front of us are about data and statistics, but we must remind ourselves that we are actually talking about people's lives—people who live in poverty and who cannot afford to heat their homes or to eat.

To go back in history, last year we had the green social justice booklet, then—in November last year—we had the blue booklet, and now we have the red booklet, which is the annual report. In the week of the troubled presidential election, I am not sure whether I should mention "Primary Colors", but all we need to do is add the yellow booklet, which of course would show the benefits of independence; however, we will not get that under devolution. A vote for the SNP would deliver that booklet.

On Monday, the First Minister, surrounded by a phalanx of ministers, was stage-managed to promote the annual report as a major step forward in the fight for social justice. The fact that the First Minister chose Glasgow—a city with some of the worst health, housing and poverty issues—in which to publish that flawed document is of concern, not because he was wrong to put social justice on the agenda, but because he brought a flawed document. I will develop that point as I progress.

I welcome the money in the form of the children's change fund, but the announcement rings hollow when we realise that local authorities are having to find £23 million in education cuts this year. Bearing in mind that new Labour will spend £2.4 billion less on local authorities than was spent in the last three years of the previous Tory Government, the £70 million for the children's change fund does not even start to make up the shortfall. Many families, particularly poor ones with children, rely heavily on local authority services or on the voluntary services that used to be provided before the funding was cut.

While the Labour party seeks to raid the SNP policy bank further to make up for the bad policy that it is having to ditch, I remind the minister that I

will be charging commission on the theft of the SNP children's challenge policy that was launched in spring 1999.

**Jackie Baillie:** Fiona Hyslop's talk of the theft of policies is an interesting development. Where is the SNP's commitment to ending child poverty? What are its targets and time scales? We would be delighted to hear them, because, so far, we have heard soundbites and scare stories but no substance.

**Fiona Hyslop:** If the minister thinks that the target of ending child poverty over 20 years is ambitious, I feel sorry for the people of Scotland.

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Let me move on.

This Parliament has some history, and we are moving on. I remind the Executive that in November last year, when we debated social justice milestones and targets, the SNP moved amendment S1M-314.2, which stated that the Parliament

"recognises the appalling poverty we have in Scotland and the need for immediate action to tackle this poverty; welcomes the publication by the Scottish Executive of *Social Justice – a Scotland where everyone matters*; believes however that the report lacks definition, range, focus and clear achievable targets, and agrees that the Executive should re-evaluate the report brought forward by the Evaluation Framework action team and bring forward revised targets and indicators to the Parliament."

**Mr McNeil:** Will the member give way?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I want to develop my point.

The SNP amendment today recognises that we need an annual report, but it would benefit the Parliament and future generations in Scotland if that report were independent and included indicators that had been agreed by all parties in the chamber. If the social justice report is to be meaningful, it must stand the test of time and not vary from year to year.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** Given the record of the previous Tory Government, how optimistic is Fiona Hyslop that we could possibly reach agreement across the Parliament on poverty indicators? Surely it is much better for us to consider what the programme has done in identifying where the real problems lie and not to rely on reaching consensus with a group that has done so much to damage our young people.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I would not rely on the Tories to do anything about poverty, but if we are ambitious for the Parliament we must recognise that we are laying foundations for the future with criteria such as the basis on which we judge the social action plan.



**Mr McNeil:** Will the member give way?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am conscious of time, and I want to develop my point.

The document is flawed. I will use some indicators from the document to show how the Executive has changed its position, even from last year, to make the percentage figures benefit the Executive and its policy initiatives.

The second indicator on children is:

"Reducing the proportion of our children living in low income households".

The baseline figures that are used are for 1996-97. One of last year's documents—either the green one or the blue one—said that 1997-98 figures would be used. Funnily enough, when the baseline is changed in that way, the proportion of children who live in low-income households is shown to have reduced from 34 per cent to 30 per cent, instead of producing a comparison of 30 per cent to 30 per cent, or no change.

I agree that change will not necessarily show up over one year, but the Minister for Social Justice should not fiddle the figures to prove her points.

**Jackie Baillie:** We used 1996-97 figures as a baseline because that allowed us to measure over a longer period of time. Income measures include reserved powers and we wanted to be able to draw a contrast with what is happening across Britain. If the member cares to read the technical document, which is also red, she will find that there are 20 different measures on income poverty, 19 of which are moving in the right direction. Child poverty is down by 40,000 in one year—

**Fiona Hyslop:** Let us take the first indicator on children, which is:

"Reducing the proportion of our children living in workless households".

According to the report, we have managed to achieve an improvement of 3 per cent, but the Executive has changed the definition on which the statistics last year were based. If performance was measured in the way that was suggested last year, the improvement would be only 1 per cent.

I make this serious point because of what was done to unemployment figures under the recent Tory Government and then under the Labour Government at Westminster. The figures were fiddled to make the situation look better. I implore the Executive not to do that with poverty statistics, which are too important for Scotland. It is important that people are treated with respect and that we have decent statistics, based on firm foundations, that will serve this country well.

I am also concerned about measures that should be included in the report but are not.

Internet access is measured, but not children's free school meals. On child poverty, a report by Glasgow City Council looked at the impact of the working families tax credit. The Minister for Social Justice talked about joined-up government, but the Glasgow report found that because of the tapering on housing benefit and council tax rebates, many families on the tax credit were no better off than they were before they took up work.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)** rose—

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am sorry, but I have taken a number of interventions and I want to move on.

Much of the report's information on young families relies on figures from the new deal. The problem is that the new deal is a revolving door, and that young people and others do not obtain permanent employment through it. The document talks about lone parents, but only a third of them end up in employment through the new deal. Gordon Brown says that he is introducing choices, but how effective are such programmes and do they offer real choices for young mothers and others in Scotland? I referred to pensioners and my concern about the source of the £350 million. Pensioners still want pensions to be linked to earnings.

On housing and the trumpeted improved budget, it is not only the SNP that questions the figures. The respected Chartered Institute of Housing challenges the Government's figures; it does not think that there has been an 18 per cent increase in the housing budget and claims that the increase is more like 6 per cent. We must address the concerns of people who judge the Government on such statistics. We must consider what the annual report actually means and where the data come from. People from a social inclusion partnership in the east of Scotland told me that, as part of the form-filling that they are required to do, they had to tramp round the doors to find information on internet access; such bureaucracy prevents them from developing front-line services and tries the patience of overworked volunteers. That is of serious concern to the people who are involved.

On learning disability, the Association of Directors of Social Work is concerned that the budget will be less than it is in England and Wales.

We need more powers; we need fiscal, economic and social security powers. I have said before that housing benefit should be one of the first targets as an extended power of this Parliament.

People who live in poverty are looking to this Parliament to treat them with understanding, respect and dignity. That means being fair and straight in the statistics that we use. I plead with the Parliament to consider having an independent

report. We live in a country of poverty amid plenty. We live in a divided world and a divided nation—divided between those who have and those who have not. It is important that we make progress with the social justice agenda, but that we do so in an informed way and with a bit of respect. I ask the minister not to use fiddled figures when she produces future social justice annual reports.

I move amendment S1M-1345.3, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“affirms its commitment to creating a fairer society and to combating poverty; notes the publication by the Scottish Executive of the *Social Justice Annual Report 2000*; requests that in future the report is produced on an independent basis, with targets and measurements revised to be sustainable over future administrations and subject to all-party Parliamentary agreement, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to abandon those policies which are currently undermining progress in combating poverty and where necessary to make representations on behalf of the Scottish people to Her Majesty's Government to change those policies which prevent progress in achieving social justice.”

15:35

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** I would like to think that none of us would be here today unless we genuinely wished to alleviate poverty. We may take different approaches, but surely we share that goal.

I am not certain that the information in the Executive's brochure—which is not glossy, but has a rather fine matt finish—will be of all that much assistance in achieving what we seek to achieve. Fiona Hyslop is quite correct: the brochure is yet another piece of new Labour hype. It is an expensive brochure that contains meaningless and nebulous milestones that disguise the paucity of Executive ideas to deal with Labour's big idea of 1997.

The Minister for Social Justice and Henry McLeish himself wallow in self-congratulation. At the same time, they hide behind a 96-page document, backed up by a further 84 pages of meaningless statistics, which simply shows that the Executive is presiding over the trends of improvement in health and the economy that have been going on for many years. Those improving trends are simply ignored—just as they were when the minister's predecessor, Wendy Alexander, introduced the social justice document last year.

The people of Scotland's disadvantaged areas will not be conned easily by the Executive's year-zero approach to statistics. The success of Labour's social justice strategy can be seen in the soaring numbers of homeless people. The miserable and pathetic figures huddled in the doorways of Glasgow and Edinburgh bear eloquent testimony to the failure of Labour in government to respond to one of the burning

issues of our time.

The 96-page document says nothing at length. The figures in the two documents are an appalling indictment of the failure of Labour, before and after devolution, to deal with the pressing issues of homelessness, crime, education and welfare reform. Homelessness has soared to record levels under Labour; rough sleeping is at an all-time high. We have seen dramatic increases in the figures for bed-and-breakfast accommodation being used by homeless families and children.

In response to the former Deputy Minister for Local Government, who does not seem to agree with me, I point out that, under the previous Conservative Government, those figures fell over the years. Despite that, all that the Executive can do is produce, at enormous expense, documents that tell us that everyone is getting better. Who is kidding whom? Scotland's pensioners are not getting better. They will not be kidded by the 75p increase. For many of them, next year's increase will come too late.

**Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Will the member's speech be entirely negative? Is there anything positive in it at all? I am sitting here in suspense.

**Bill Aitken:** I will come to even better bits later on. I will tell the member how things can be made better. If he will just sit and listen, he will learn.

Let us consider other things that the Executive has done. I am sure that members of certain other parties will tell me that the minimum income guarantee for pensioners is lifting them out of poverty. But is it not just income support under another name?

I know that there is a very real problem that is not the Executive's fault—unclaimed benefit. However, instead of producing documents such as this one on social justice, should not the Executive be funding other documents, for widespread distribution, to ensure that those who are entitled to benefit are in receipt of the information necessary for them to claim it? The unclaimed benefits situation is quite scandalous. I am not levelling blame, but we must acknowledge that the situation is serious.

**Tommy Sheridan:** Does Bill Aitken agree that, had the Conservative Government not broken the link between earnings and pensions, today pensioners would be £32 per week better off?

**Bill Aitken:** As I have said before, Tommy Sheridan never asks a question to which he does not know the answer. That link was broken during different economic times when there were real and pressing reasons for doing so. I must get on because I have a lot to get through.

Members may wonder why I have included so

many Westminster issues in my speech. I am emulating the document that we are debating today. The majority of the issues that are being discussed are reserved matters. However, we must get involved.

The Executive is so short of good news on devolved matters that its pronouncements on the social justice programme concentrate on child poverty. I will acknowledge that there have been improvements in that area. However, I must disabuse members of the notion that those improvements stem from the actions of the Executive. Part of that benefit comes from a massive redistribution of wealth by a Chancellor of the Exchequer who has certainly not chosen to tax the rich, but has increased the tax burden on a much easier target: hard-working families. He has channelled those funds into increased welfare spending, such as the working families tax credit. Surely, in any international comparison, that would be called a welfare benefit rather than a tax credit or tax break.

There has been a reduction in the number of children living in workless households. But that is not due to the efforts of the Executive; it is down to the hard work of entrepreneurs, wealth creators and, most important of all, the unemployed people who are seeking a better life for themselves and their families. I remind members that the British economy has been growing since 1992 and that unemployment has decreased year on year. Just as in the discredited new deal, Labour is trying to claim credit for the hard work and initiative of individuals who have gone out and found a job for themselves.

**The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran):** Will the member give way?

**Bill Aitken:** No. I must press on.

What does social justice mean? It means people living up to their responsibilities and being given and taking opportunities that are genuinely open. The state cannot and should not do everything. Social justice means believing in the truly independent work of charities. We must allow communities and individuals to take responsibility for their own problems; we must encourage and enable them to find their own solutions.

The most basic concept underpinning individual responsibility is the rule of law. If we cannot reduce crime and remove the fear of crime, we will be unable to give people the freedom that they need to take charge of the problems that afflict some of Scotland's most deprived communities.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the member give way?

**Bill Aitken:** No. I have lost a lot of time already.

Fear of crime is insidious and is often linked to our failure to tackle the menace of drugs that

blights not only our housing estates, but the leafy suburbs and rural areas of Scotland.

With freedom comes responsibility. It is clear that the Executive's programme and the Government's welfare policies take away responsibility from individuals and families. If real benefits are to be experienced, we must reverse that trend. The Executive continues to press its targets and priorities on councils, schools, community groups and charities through its controls on spending. Only when it allows local action and responsibility can the Executive engender innovation. That is what is needed to resolve local problems.

We need real devolution such as under the Conservative proposals for schools. Councils should have more control over their spending, rather than having money ring-fenced by the Executive's priorities. We need an NHS that concentrates on waiting times based on clinical priority. The resources of the NHS should be enhanced by those people who can afford it making a greater contribution to their health care costs, through mutual schemes run by employers and trade unions. We need a welfare system that encourages personal responsibility, work and family.

The Executive has a long way to go to meet its social justice targets. Perhaps the most important step on that route is one that would take ministers past the ideological barrier that dictates that only the state can provide. If that step is taken soon, social justice will be much closer for all Scots.

I move amendment S1M-1345.1, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"notes the information published to date which shows that the Scottish Executive still has a long way to go to meet its objectives on social justice; affirms its commitment to building a civic society based on opportunities and responsibilities for all, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to address the problems of crime in Scotland's communities and devolve power to individuals, families and communities as essential steps on the road to achieving social justice."

15:45

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** I understand that the correct description of Executive attitudes and policies is progressive and pragmatic. Therefore, I hope that we can welcome the social justice annual report, as it is both progressive and pragmatic. As someone who often criticises Governments of all colours for producing waffling reports and disguising the truth, I think that the serious effort that has been made in the report to include statistics to show how we are progressing towards our goals is a good step forward. We can argue about the accuracy and honesty of particular statistics, but the main thrust of the report should be welcomed unreservedly.

The nice Quaker lady who led our time for reflection had various good passages by William Penn on being charitable to one's opponents, so I will not mention the SNP or the Tories. I will address certain Westminster issues, which are separate from what we deal with here. The Liberal Democrats feel strongly that the Labour Government at Westminster has got some things wrong.

For example, we think that benefits should be restored to 16 and 17-year-olds and that the lower rates of benefit for under-25s should be increased. The single-room rent rule has an adverse impact on those at the bottom of the income heap who seek accommodation. Although the recent increase in pensions is welcome, there is still a need for greater increases, particularly for older pensioners. The benefits rules should be greatly simplified. I am sure that all members are shown examples of the huge books that people have to complete before they are awarded a disability benefit or whatever it might be. The whole system is hideously complex.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I welcome much of what Donald Gorrie has said, as many of his comments are reflected in the SNP's policy on benefit reforms. He will notice that our amendment calls on the Executive

"to make representations on behalf of the Scottish people to Her Majesty's Government to change those policies which prevent progress in achieving social justice."

As Donald Gorrie has just listed several of those policies, does he think that it is the responsibility of the Parliament to ask the Executive to make representations on the reform of benefits?

**Donald Gorrie:** It is quite legitimate for the Parliament to raise these issues and, through the Executive or the Presiding Officer, to convey its views to Westminster. Members can also convey their views to their party colleagues at Westminster.

We think that the higher rate of income tax should be increased so that more people can drop out the bottom end and pay no income tax at all and so that improvements can be made in public services. A 50 per cent rate for income above £100,000 will not cripple richer people.

Although the new deal is a good concept and has many positive aspects, it is very bureaucratic and wasteful and needs scrutiny. I know that no Government that has invested so much financial and intellectual capital in an idea will abandon it or admit that it is no good, but it is important that there should be an honest reappraisal of the new deal to build on the good parts and improve the bad.

The Scottish Parliament is starting to do quite well some of the things that it can do. For

example, the attack on fuel poverty and the proposals on concessionary travel are welcome. The two parts of the social justice annual report illustrate a number of areas in which we have made definite advances. However, there is room for improvement in other areas. Rural poverty and the rural transport issue are still not adequately recognised. People may have a nice view, but if they cannot get to the shops or the hospital, in many ways they suffer from social injustice.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** As Donald Gorrie has raised the topic of rural poverty, on which we agree with him, does he now condemn the Liberal policy of increasing in rural areas the level of excise duty on fuel by the rate of inflation for each of the next five years? How will that help those in rural areas who rely on the use of a motor car?

**Donald Gorrie:** As I understand it, we have proposals to help to reduce the tax on fuel in rural areas, which I think will accomplish the goal that Fergus Ewing has in mind.

The other aspect that needs attention is credit unions, which we could encourage more. The credit unions are a good example of the bottom-up approach, which is important. Helping people collectively to help themselves should be at the heart of our efforts to produce social justice.

**Jackie Baillie:** May I make a helpful intervention?

**Donald Gorrie:** Yes.

**Jackie Baillie:** On the basis of Donald Gorrie's comments, I take it that he will welcome the Executive's national development strategy on credit unions, which we intend to introduce in the next few months.

**Donald Gorrie:** I greatly welcome that assurance.

We must also consider bureaucratic overload. That comes partly through United Kingdom initiatives, but the disease affects our Executive too. Many well-intentioned programmes involve a huge amount of form-filling by councils, and much money is never spent, or if spent, it is not spent wisely. The programmes are all higgledy-piggledy. As one of my colleagues at Westminster said in a press release, we are turning councils into

"pen pushers bidding for piecemeal pots of money."

That is the wrong approach. We should help communities to help themselves. If we had funds to which communities could apply in a much less bureaucratic fashion, they could get on with their plans and do not what I want or the minister wants but what the people in that community want. Some money would be wasted, and there might be some marginal dishonesty, but much less would be

wasted than in a bureaucratic system. People could do their own thing, make their own mistakes and develop their own community.

We think that such ideas should be the basis of the Executive's approach. Some advance has been made in those directions, but not nearly enough. We must have more money to allow councils to help voluntary organisations, for example, which are still suffering cuts. We must devise some method of helping those organisations while retaining local autonomy, because they are basic to the further development of those communities.

Many other issues are involved, but I will raise just one more: alcohol problems, which I discussed in a members' business debate the other day. That issue affects social justice and injustice, and we must tackle it and many other matters. The minister has the difficult business of producing joined-up government, instead of talking about it, as we all do. I wish the minister good luck, and I hope that she will work with communities, instead of imposing her will on them.

15:53

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** Whatever the Scottish National Party may say, social justice is at the heart of the Government's agenda, and rightly so. The Executive should be congratulated not only on such a wide-ranging report, but on such a detailed one. The report moves the issues on—especially the new perspectives on rural deprivation, which I will come to later.

It should be acknowledged—but does not appear to be by the SNP—that a strong economy allows more money to be used to address social exclusion. Indeed, social justice was at the heart of the spending review and, as the minister said, an extra £6 billion is to be injected into Scottish services over the next three years. Although there are many positive comments I would like to make about the report, I want to address two issues in particular.

My first point is that poverty occurs in many different contexts: big cities, smaller urban areas and rural areas. Dr Lorna Philip and Professor Shucksmith, in their account of rural poverty, come to some important conclusions. They say:

"It can be very difficult to isolate data about poverty and related socio-economic disadvantage for rural areas. There is a pressing need for a comprehensive data bank about rural poverty and other issues directly associated with socio-economic disadvantage across rural Scotland. An urban-rural breakdown of the Scottish Executive's social justice milestones would be useful and would complement the information on rural Scotland now available in the Scottish Household Survey."

Dr Philip and Professor Shucksmith continue:

"Finally, rural development policies must become more attuned to social inclusion objectives. Area-based partnership working, often resourced through challenge funding, has become established as a principal means for the implementation of rural development policies in Scotland, as elsewhere in Europe. This leads to a very uneven geography or rural regeneration."

In particular, they call for

"New and innovative methods of implementing rural development"

which, they say,

"will be required if social exclusion is to be addressed".

Will the minister give us details—if not today, then later—of the work undertaken so far by the rural poverty and inclusion working group and how it will progress the rural development aspect of its work?

On a related point, we should ensure that the pockets of disadvantage that exist in smaller urban settings—I am talking about Stirling, of course—are not lost in the process of tackling social exclusion. Too often, statistics give misleading data, particularly on areas such as Stirling, which has the most polarised distribution of rich and poor living side by side.

For example, using the standard mortality ratios for men and women, the Stirling Council area comes out well and looks reasonably healthy. However, by digging deeper and using postcode districts, one finds very disturbing figures. Areas of high relative deprivation in Stirling, such as the Raploch area, have exceptionally high ratio values and, for women, those values are almost 66 per cent higher than the Stirling average. If the relationship between social class and mental health disorders is added, the figures become even more disturbing. Will the minister consider developing an indicator or target to link social inclusion and mental health issues? There is a growing awareness of the problems related to those issues.

Much has to be done in Castlevue, which includes the Raploch area, and much is planned, with the establishment of a community school, where I hope that a holistic approach, which Jackie Baillie spoke about, will develop. Much also needs to be done—and measures replicated—in other similarly disadvantaged areas in smaller urban areas.

With that health warning, I welcome the report, which is a good start in the right direction.

15:57

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP):** I am tempted to say that so weighty is the Executive's report, which is printed on such heavy, fine-quality paper, that we could do something socially

inclusive with it, such as mend a roof in Easterhouse.

We talk about social justice, but at lunchtime today, people from the most deprived schemes in the city of Glasgow made their way to the Parliament to demand social justice. They came at their own expense to show a video about community centres and other facilities being closed. I am afraid that I have to say that representatives of the Labour party and of the Scottish Executive ignored them. Only the SNP turned up to face the truth direct from the people.

One of the truths raised was that not only are swimming pools and community centres closing in some areas, but, in Drumchapel, even the unemployed workers centre, which was almost the only place that people could go to during the day, has closed. So much for the section in "Social Justice Annual Report Scotland 2000" that is headed "every community matters". Tragically, it seems that some communities still do not matter enough.

**Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Dorothy-Grace Elder:** No, Frankie. I do not have much time and will plough on. You can get me in the coffee room.

I turn to the proposed Glasgow housing stock transfer, which is the worst example of social injustice and involves social clearances. We should not beat about the bush much longer—the stock transfer plan was begun in Westminster, before the Scottish Parliament was created. Since January 1999—[*Interruption.*]

**Cathie Craigie:** Will the member give way?

**Mr McAveety:** Will the member give way?

**Dorothy-Grace Elder:** I am afraid that Labour members have been so timid that they rolled over and obeyed Mr Blair, rather than going down another, publicly funded, path. Mr Blair wants to end the principle of social housing. He wants to impose an Islington solution on the people of Scotland and that is why the date for the ballot is likely to be moved back to late 2001.

**Mr McAveety:** Will Dorothy give way on that point?

**Dorothy-Grace Elder:** As a back bencher, I get only four minutes to speak, so I shall not accept any interventions from Frankie.

**Mr McAveety:** Do you remember me?

**Dorothy-Grace Elder:** The date is being moved back to late 2001 because the people of Glasgow are saying that they are not going to be conned. Fifteen of the 29 tenants forums have already intimated to David Comely that their answer will be

no.

If anyone wants to see the proof of planned social engineering, they need only look at Drumchapel, where a proposed scheme will see 1,100 council houses knocked down, with 1,000 private houses replacing them.

**Mr McAveety:** Will Dorothy-Grace Elder give way?

**Dorothy-Grace Elder:** I have told Frank already not to be so persistent with me.

**Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. When a speaker quite clearly says that she is not giving way, why do people repeatedly stand up demanding interventions? That is out of order and you should deal with it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** That is not a point of order. However, I must tell you, Mr McAveety, that Dorothy-Grace Elder has indicated that she does not want to take interventions. I would be grateful if you could respect her wishes. Please carry on, Ms Elder.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder:** I know that Mr McAveety is concerned. He and I were at a tenants' meeting in the Gorbals last week at which the women were so angry that I almost had to give him political asylum.

Anyway, I return to Drumchapel, where 1,000 private houses are planned to replace the 1,100 council houses that will be demolished. Those private houses will cost up to £100,000 each. Who in central Drumchapel can afford that?

That is the Blairism that the Executive should reject. It should go back down the public path, it should ensure that Glasgow does not lose £200 million in VAT and it should turn its back, before it is too late, on the scam and the sham, and seek a proper Scottish solution, not a Blairist one.

16:02

**Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab):** The first question that I asked myself when I considered today's motion was "What is social justice? We talk about it, but I don't know what it is." For me, social justice is socialism. It was my concern for social justice that took me into the Labour movement and the trade union movement at an early age. Above all, socialism is, and social justice must be, about eradicating poverty and inequality. However, it is not about eradicating financial poverty only; it is about tackling the poverty of opportunity and the hopelessness that exists in some of our deprived communities. Social justice is not just the stuff of aspirational political speeches; it is much more than that.

There are obvious definitions of social justice or

socialism. It is concerned with protecting vulnerable children. It must be concerned with supporting families, ensuring full employment and providing opportunities for people with different forms of disability. It is about ensuring that older people are properly cared for and that we all have the right to a free education, a free health service, a humane welfare system and a warm, comfortable home in a safe environment. That is the language of social justice, but it is also the language of socialism.

Poverty among our children is one of the greatest scars on Scottish communities today. They are often powerless to change the environment in which they live and learn. We have a duty to ensure that every child in Scotland has access to the same opportunities and that they can live in a safe home, free from abuse. I believe that the Executive is making genuine progress in tackling child poverty, with reductions in the number of children living in a family where no one works or where there is income poverty. However, much more needs to be done. Thirty-two per cent of our children still live in poverty, with no political or economic power. We are their representatives, we are their movers and shakers and we are the ones who must give them hope.

The nationalists may scoff and moan, which they do regularly, but scoffing and moaning is not a substitute for real policies or real money to tackle child poverty. Today they have said that they want to agree a definition of poverty with the Tories. After hearing Bill Aitken's speech, I wonder whether they intend to continue with that.

If we want to eradicate poverty, we have a mountain to climb. That is why the long-term commitment that the First Minister has announced of an extra £70 million from 2002, to be spent on services for the most vulnerable children, is most welcome.

In last week's debate on the equality strategy and in this debate, the Tory spokesperson used a kind of single transferable speech. Bill Aitken is nodding his head, which suggests that he agrees with me. Today the Tories have said, as they did last week, that they are concerned that social justice is political correctness. They can call it what they like, as long as they sign up to it. In my surgeries in Port Glasgow and elsewhere there is no great clamour for an extension of private health care or private education. Quite rightly, my constituents demand fairness and equality in all things. If the Conservatives want to call that political correctness, that is fine.

All too often, people with disabilities find themselves powerless and unable to improve their lives because of barriers that they encounter when they try to find work. We must revisit the needs of the long-term disabled, especially the young. Our

social justice agenda must deliver real opportunities and high-quality services for people with disabilities, and it must not take long to realise such reform.

There must be vigorous and stringent audits of the progress of this Executive in delivering social justice—or, as I would have it, socialism—and in tackling child poverty. This Parliament and its committees have an important role to play in that regard. Whenever members come across a child or an adult in their constituency who is living in poverty or is having difficulty finding work, they must ask why that is and what they can do in the Parliament and its committees to change that person's life.

The issues that I have mentioned as fundamental to social justice have been the subject of debates in this Parliament over the past few months. Given the Executive's commitment to advancing the social justice agenda, I look forward to a continued, but reasoned, debate that will allow us to effect radical change in the lives of the most vulnerable people in our communities. In the committees and in the chamber, we can check what progress is being made and call the Executive to account.

16:07

**Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Donald Dewar's vision of social justice has become Henry McLeish's mirage—tantalisingly on the horizon, but disappearing whenever reality creeps in. This document—which, I am pleased to see, is not glossy—is another example of squandered opportunities. It is full of politically correct language, but contains no evidence of determinate policies or of a will to address the real problems of the disadvantaged of Scotland.

Labour does not have a monopoly on caring. I say to Trish Godman that we are only too prepared to contribute to the debate, but we must have concrete policies to discuss, not a nebulous concoction of dreams and wishes.

Bill Aitken has highlighted the Executive's failures. I want to concentrate on why it is failing the philosophy that it must embrace to succeed and—vitality—what that means in practice. The philosophy is readily available and ministers may already subscribe to it. It is summed up as follows:

"We are building a new civic society based on opportunities and responsibilities . . . It recognises that government cannot solve every problem, cure every ill. It understands that the state does not have a monopoly on compassion; that social needs can be met by institutions, organisations, and associations, autonomous of—and other than—central government."

Those are wise words, but they are not the words of a Tory. They are the words of the Rt Hon John

Reid MP, Labour Secretary of State for Scotland, speaking in May this year.

If the philosophy exists, and it is the right philosophy, what has gone wrong? The obvious answer is that, in practice, the Scottish Executive is failing to live up to the ideal espoused by Dr Reid. In education, it has introduced the excellence fund, which councils can access only if they agree to match the Executive's priorities and spending, at the cost of devolved school management budgets that could reflect local priorities. In health, it has sought increasingly to control the NHS from the centre, by ministerial diktat. Through the discredited waiting list initiative, it has replaced clinical priorities with political priorities.

In council funding, control has been centralised. There is more ring-fencing and more funding is conditional on following through the Executive's priorities. Charity funding is increasingly difficult to obtain in the voluntary sector owing to recent local government settlements.

At UK level, more and more people are being drawn into the welfare net through the working families tax credit, the minimum income guarantee for pensioners and other measures that remove individual responsibility. Probably worst of all given the breakdown in the family, the last recognition of marriage in our tax system has gone.

Labour is failing the UK and the Executive is failing to bring about a new civic society in Scotland—a natural precursor and partner to social justice—because it has ignored the philosophy and tried increasingly to monopolise compassion for the state. Doing so ignores the vital role of Scotland's charities, our faith communities, local and national voluntary organisations, individual action that assists neighbours and communities and—most important—the role of the family and extended family as a self-contained caring community.

What is the prescription? It is time to draw back the involvement of the state and restore the role of personal responsibility and opportunity in our society. By doing so we can instil the values that we require for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We must devolve power to the most local level possible. We should allow Scots the opportunity to be involved in their child's education through autonomous school boards and let them live up to the responsibility that comes with that.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson:** Will Mr Harding give way?

**Mr Harding:** Sorry, I have no time.

We should put in place a welfare system that rewards those who, through saving, aim to look after their own future needs and those of their families. We should encourage people to be more

responsible for their future health by allowing more choice in health services and allowing clinical need to have priority through a new partnership between the NHS professionals and patients.

On housing, we need stock transfer away from politicians to community organisations with tenant involvement. We should encourage charities and faith-based groups to innovate to resolve the problems of our sink housing estates, the rising suicides among young men and the lack of values in our society.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** Will Mr Harding give way?

**Mr Harding:** I am closing.

The Executive should not be hidebound in a one-size-fits-all approach.

**Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** On a point of order. Is it in order for the member to have spoken for four minutes and 30 seconds without referring once to the report that is central to this debate?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** I am conscious of that.

I ask Mr Harding to bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr Harding:** I referred to the document at the outset.

Giving people choice and allowing diversity brings involvement and interaction with others and will build the civic society that we require.

I will conclude with a quotation of Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi. When writing of the virtues that most of us still accept: honesty; keeping out of crime; parental responsibility; fidelity, he warned that he believes that

"too much public policy undermines these virtuous instincts".

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I should add that when members give way, I will always allow a little extra time.

16:13

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** I am exhausted after listening to that.

I loved reading the social justice annual report. It has lots of lovely graphs, statistics, warm words and hope. Who could fail to be impressed by the Executive's commitment to change lives for the better? That commitment is undoubtedly genuine and heartfelt.

The minister talked about the closing of data gaps, but in the mass of figures it is clear that the areas with the highest deprivation in 1984 still have the highest deprivation now. Compared with



the Scottish average, the ratio of unemployed in the most deprived areas has—according to the Executive itself—increased since new Labour came to power.

The minister is shaking her head, but if she examines milestone 24 on page 65 of the social justice annual report, she will know where I am getting that information from.

However, does the information tell the whole story? Government figures do not recognise the geography of unemployment in, for example, Glasgow. The claimant count in Pollok is three times the Scottish average. That is horrific in itself, but Government measurements do not break figures down sufficiently at a local level to show how labour markets function by community.

As a result, Glasgow City Council, for example, ignores the Government's figures because they fail to gauge accurately the extent and distribution of real poverty in the city. Further, the claimant count is an artificially depressed rate that the council considers meaningless. Glasgow City Council has gone so far as to tell the Office for National Statistics not to publish figures for Glasgow using the Government's measures—but it has been ignored.

The council's measurement focuses down to ward level and is a truer indicator of unemployment and deprivation. Calculations are based on the number of people who are economically active and the claimant count. That system is recognised and used by the House of Commons library, academics and authors. Such measures have shown substantial disparity in real levels of unemployment on a ward-by-ward basis.

In Hutchesontown ward, for example, the unemployment rate is seven times higher than it is in Maxwell Park, although a comparison of the respective parliamentary constituencies of Shettleston and Govan shows a variance of only one third in Govan's favour.

Why are such statistical measures important? If we are really to address poverty and deprivation at the micro level and deliver social justice for all, the nature and extent of poverty and deprivation must be identified accurately. The extent to which a community thrives is obviously dependent on employment. Scarce resources must be targeted effectively if we are to improve the lives of the maximum number of people.

Parts of the indicators of progress document outline the difficulties with assessing the geographic spread of social exclusion. For example, page 5 of the report makes it clear that it is not possible to provide

"sub-Scottish figures on either a regional basis or disaggregated by age, gender, disability or ethnicity"

of the number of children who are living in workless households, thus making it difficult for agencies to tackle this issue in a more focused way. Milestones 2, 5, 7, 8, 9 and so on similarly fail to analyse the figures at a local level.

Once we know who to focus on, what should we do? I shall finish by focusing on the new deal. Investing in Scotland's infrastructure at a local community level is vital. We must ensure that those who are on the new deal receive real chances to gain the skills and qualifications that are necessary in today's labour market. Each new deal delivery unit must be decentralised and allowed to react to the labour market it deals with—something the voluntary sector, local authorities and other agencies stress continually.

The new deal options should be overhauled or reappraised, as Donald Gorrie said, to give local partnerships the power to develop and implement options that suit a specific area, its people and employers. The gateway must be extended for more than four months, to allow the investment in time and effort that is needed to motivate and train the unemployed.

Through the new deal, Westminster has re-established its central control of the employment services by linking training, which is supposed to be a devolved matter, to welfare, which is a reserved matter. The obvious solution is to hand over responsibility for the new deal to this Parliament along with the remainder of its budget. We could then re-engineer the scheme into a responsive and flexible programme.

Although new Labour suggests that it will listen to ideas about reform, its centralised nature means that it could take a long time for vital changes to be made. We cannot wait that long; it is essential for this Parliament to be given responsibility for such changes as soon as possible.

16:17

**Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** It is absolutely right that this Parliament is committed to eliminating child poverty, facilitating employment opportunities for all those who can work, securing dignity for elderly folk and building strong and inclusive communities. Until now, successive Governments have associated social justice simplistically with our inner cities and urban areas. Although it is, unfortunately, all too true that many of the worst examples of social exclusion occur in such areas, that is far from the complete picture.

I am pleased that the Scottish Executive coalition of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats is committed to addressing social justice wherever it is found. I say to Trish Godman

that social justice and social reform are fundamental principles of liberalism. Together, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats are determined to make the slogan on the cover of this document—

“a Scotland where everyone matters”—

a reality. I am delighted that an entire section of the social justice annual report is devoted to addressing rural poverty in Scotland. That aspect of social justice has for far too long been neglected by previous Governments, and I commend the Executive for highlighting it in its report and for establishing the rural poverty and inclusion working group.

Until now, part of the problem has been that successive Governments have been reluctant to address rural poverty because it is too easily hidden. Many people hold on to an idyllic picture of the countryside that excludes poverty and deprivation. Concentrations of poverty are hard to identify and are therefore easily disguised. The Scottish Executive reported earlier this year that 20 per cent of households in rural Scotland received incomes of below £108 a week. Low wages are common among workers who are employed in agriculture and tourism—both industries that are important to the rural economy.

The problems of low pay are exacerbated by the high cost of living in rural communities. Let us take transport as an example. Until now, there seems to have been little realisation of the fact that the use of a car is necessary in much of rural Scotland: that is why the recent and continuing protest over the level of fuel taxation hits a raw nerve in the countryside.

For many people, public transport is not an option—it is simply not available—and it is a mockery for Governments to pretend that continually rising petrol taxation will force people off our roads and on to public transport. Such an argument is wrong for many people who live in rural Scotland and I welcome the UK Government's decision to freeze fuel taxation.

As this point, it is important to point out what the report emphasises on this aspect of transport. It says:

“The car ownership rate for elderly households in rural Scotland is lower than the rural average. As a result many elderly households experience limited personal mobility which can lead to exclusion from services, facilities and social spheres of life.”

The report acknowledges that car ownership is essential in rural areas and that many low-income households forgo other purchases to ensure that they continue to run a car.

The previous census recorded the fact that almost a third of households in rural Scotland did

not have access to a car. Life for the poorest in rural areas has become far more difficult with the closure of many small shops, petrol stations and post offices and the centralisation of public services in response to public expenditure constraints.

Jackie Baillie, in particular, should be congratulated on highlighting this issue: this is a very welcome step in addressing social issues in rural communities. I shall end with a simple plea for more information. As Sylvia Jackson said, there is an indisputable need for a comprehensive data bank about rural poverty. I applaud the Executive's actions in getting the necessary data so we can take effective action for both rural and urban Scotland.

16:21

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):**

No one in the chamber can doubt that social injustice exists in modern Scotland. No one who has recently walked the streets of Drumchapel and Kelvindale—as I am sure many of us have—can be under any illusions about the divide that still remains between the haves and the have-nots. Too many Scots grow up in poverty and are denied educational opportunities; too many are forced to live in houses and environments that contribute to exclusion rather than combat it; too many live in communities that are ravaged and eroded by drug misuse.

The publication of “Social Justice ...a Scotland where everyone matters” marks the beginning of a process that aims to end child poverty, to achieve full employment and to ensure that our elderly can live with comfort and dignity. This afternoon, I want to focus on two elements of the social justice programme: tackling unemployment and rebuilding communities.

One of the most effective ways to combat social exclusion is to expand employment and training opportunities. Employment can restore not only income and material wealth, but confidence and feelings of self-worth. The Conservative-led programme for partnership sought to remedy the piecemeal approach of the urban programme. The partnership approach that it heralded has been retained in our social inclusion partnerships. Ironically, though, the Tories never really understood—or perhaps never wanted to understand—the need for partnership in government.

A partnership approach—between Westminster and Holyrood and within departments of the Scottish Executive—has led to real moves towards achieving social justice in Scotland. The new deal has had a significant impact on unemployment levels; unemployment is now at its lowest level for

a generation.

The Scottish Executive is playing its part in the partnership effort by ensuring that people from our poorest communities have improved access to further and higher education. The launch of a network of learndirect Scotland learning centres will bring adult education into the heart of Scotland's communities. Furthermore, the introduction of non-repayable access bursaries for priority groups and the exemption of mature, disabled, lone parent and higher national diploma and higher national certificate students from the graduate endowment will act as an incentive to many previously excluded students.

It is vital that communities are genuinely involved in the decision-making process at a local level. For that to happen, we require training and support and a genuine commitment to partnership working by the other partners. I am pleased that the Scottish Executive has recognised that need by investing more than £1 million in the community participation skills programme "Working Together, Learning Together".

Social inclusion partnerships are one of the primary vehicles for community and neighbourhood regeneration. However, let me sound a note of caution. Many smaller communities, such as Craigneuk and Petersburn in my constituency, fall outwith SIP areas, despite the fact that they face many of the same problems as the larger areas designated for priority treatment. High crime rates and high levels of drug abuse are devastating the lives of many families in smaller communities. We must ensure that voluntary organisations in those communities are supported through sufficient staff and additional resources.

The report "Social Justice ...a Scotland where everyone matters", which was published last year, set out a range of targets and milestones designed to create a fairer, more just Scotland. The early signs are encouraging.

I began today by contrasting the streets of Kelvindale and Drumchapel. A walk along those streets is a testament to how far we still have to go in our struggle against poverty and exclusion.

However, our social justice programme represents a genuine attempt to regenerate our most deprived communities. It is an opportunity to focus on the eradication of poverty and exclusion in Scotland. I call on all colleagues in the chamber to support the Scottish Executive in its bid to create a more fair and just Scotland

16:26

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Karen Whitefield began and ended her speech with a

reference to Kelvindale and Drumchapel, both of which are in the Anniesland constituency. Like Karen Whitefield, I have recently been involved in by-election activities there. Those areas provide a microcosm in which to observe the problems of the class-ridden society that still exists in Scotland—a society in which it is still possible to walk through the leafy area of Kelvindale and witness the benefits of incomes that are 50 or more times those of people in Drummole Road or other parts of Drumchapel.

The problem with the social justice annual report is that the powers to tackle many of the problems that it highlights are outwith the powers of this Parliament. The limited powers that we have mean that the scope of the social justice report will always be limited. However, there are things that we can do in Scotland. The next time we walk through Kelvindale and compare it with Drumchapel, it might be worth reflecting on whether, instead of paying three times more council tax than the residents of Drumchapel, the residents of Kelvindale should pay a higher proportion of their income than that.

We should reflect on whether we should have a socialist local income tax system—based on the ability to pay—rather than the knee-jerk, unfair tax system that was introduced by the Tories when they were scrabbling around to save their necks in 1992. In Glasgow, we have within our grasp the ability to change local taxation so that we can genuinely redistribute wealth to put more money into the pockets of households that desperately require it.

I hope the minister will accept that one of the problems with the targets and statistics is that they relate to gross income; far too few of them relate to disposable income. The difficulty is that we have a marginal tax rate of 85 per cent on those in poverty, because an extra pound to someone in poverty results in a reduction in housing benefit, working families tax credit and council tax benefit of 85p in the pound. That throws into perspective the squeals of horror at the idea that there should be higher tax rates for the wealthy—which, unfortunately, Labour has not implemented.

Under Labour, we have low tax rates for the wealthy but high tax rates for the poor. It is interesting to recall that when Mrs Thatcher was elected in 1979, the highest tax rate was 83 per cent. She immediately slashed to 63 per cent—the level at which it stayed for nine years. Tax was higher for nine years under Thatcher than it has been for three and a half years under Labour. I hope that Trish Godman and other socialists are ashamed of that statistic. Not enough central policies are being implemented to tackle the problems in relation to the redistribution of wealth.

Jackie Baillie used a number of statistics. She

talked about the 70,000 children who have been removed from poverty in the past two years. I am sure that Jackie Baillie has read the poverty audit that was produced in September by the Department of Social Security. It says that there are 250,000 fewer children living in workless households but 100,000 more children living in poverty. The poverty audit makes the point that there has been a drop in unemployment but an increase in poverty. I argue that that is in relation to the low level of wages in this country. While we have a minimum wage that perpetuates poverty rather than tackles it, simply getting people into work will not reduce grinding poverty. We need a better minimum wage.

Unfortunately, yet again, my amendment has not been selected and I have not had enough time to address pensions and the fact that we need to have a proper and universal state pension rather than means testing of our pensioners. Means testing used to be the ground of the Tories but it is now the ground of new Labour.

16:31

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome this debate. A desire to tackle poverty in Scotland, which the Westminster Parliament had failed to do in decades and centuries, was one of the reasons why people supported the establishment of the Scottish Parliament.

When we think of Scotland's social problems, we tend to think of rundown housing estates in urban areas or the appalling health statistics in our cities. For that reason, I was delighted that a section of the report dealt with the situation in rural Scotland, which has been referred to by many other members.

Poverty is as bad in many rural areas as it is in urban areas, albeit on a smaller scale. Poverty relates to economic status, not the size of the community in which someone lives. As Mike Rumbles said, poverty in rural areas is often hidden. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report earlier this year called "Exclusive countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas". The title gives the gist of the report, which says that

"Those experiencing social exclusion in rural areas are dispersed amongst apparent affluence . . . factors which are more important in rural than urban areas include low pay, inadequate pensions, poverty in self-employment, lower levels of benefit uptake, and fear of stigma in small communities."

It is all very well for an oil worker earning £100,000 a year who moves up from London to Aberdeenshire and for whom local services are not a problem, but people from Aberdeenshire or the Highlands generally face two choices. One is

to leave their community and go elsewhere to make their living and have a decent standard of life. The other is to stay in their local community and experience poverty.

Social justice in rural communities means access to public services of a standard similar to that which exists elsewhere in the country. Good health services are necessary. In some parts of Grampian, it is difficult to see a dentist. It is hard to get a proper health service in many rural communities. Similarly, many are experiencing cuts in education provision due to local government cuts caused by decisions taken by the Scottish Executive.

Housing in rural areas is of a relatively low standard and there is a shortage of low-cost housing in many communities, yet it took a lot of campaigning against Wendy Alexander's right-to-buy proposals on rural housing association properties to get her to change her mind. If social justice is important, why do we have to go to such lengths to try to persuade ministers to give people in rural communities decent public services and social housing? We should not have to go to that trouble.

Young people in our rural communities deserve social justice as well. In the vast majority of rural communities, it is impossible to get access to decent youth facilities—they do not exist. Rural communities deserve decent social services, yet community agencies that tackle drugs, such as Grampian Addiction Problem Services, are losing all their cash because of cuts in local government funding. We are losing social services—the situation is going backwards, not forwards, in rural Scotland.

We need to bring many more modern industries into our rural communities as well as sustain our traditional industries. The cost of living is a problem: fuel has already been mentioned, as have water charges, which were the subject of a statement this afternoon.

Until Scotland gets its independence in two or three years' time, this Parliament is going to have to punch above its weight to deliver social justice in our rural communities and elsewhere. When the next progress report is published next year, I ask the Executive to publish a section that details milestones of progress in our rural communities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** My regrets to John Young, Johann Lamont and Colin Campbell, for whom time ran out. Winding-up speeches will be four minutes, five minutes, seven minutes and 10 minutes.

16:35

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** This has been a good debate, although it has been punctuated

by a number of regrettable tendencies, such as party politicising much more than is necessary the serious issues with which we are dealing. In summing up for the Liberal Democrats, I will try to draw out one or two themes that have come up in the debate.

The first is that all speakers in debates such as this should recognise the sincerity and good faith of their political opponents. All of us in this chamber are concerned about poverty, deprivation and all the rest of it. All of us, from our different perspectives, want something to be done, particularly when we focus on old people, children and people sleeping in the streets. Let us have a little good faith towards those of different political views.

The second theme is that we should not dismiss people on the basis of class. I was disturbed to hear, in the by-election earlier in the debate, dismissive references to people in Kelvindale. The fact is that the people in Kelvindale are as mixed as people are in any other area. There are pockets of poverty in Kelvindale. It is one of the oldest communities in the country, in terms of the age profile of the population, and therefore includes many elderly people—as well as people in other age groups—who are living in poverty. They may live in a community that is nicer than some others, but their problems are as serious as those experienced by people in any other area, so let us deal in terms of people, and not in terms of classes or areas.

**Tommy Sheridan:** Will the member give way?

**Robert Brown:** No. Let me continue, because I have only a short time.

As we have all recognised, the report that we are dealing with today is a halfway house, partly because of the limitations of the statistics that are available in Scotland. It was unfortunate that Fiona Hyslop went on a bit too long about issues to do with this statistic or that statistic, but she had a good point when she referred to the need for an independent approach to the statistical base in this matter, because it is difficult to agree on start, finish and progress points.

In looking at the figures for young people and children, I was struck by the reference to the static nature of the number of 16 to 19-year-olds who are not in education, training or employment—the figure is something like 14 or 15 per cent—withstanding improvements in the general economic condition of the country. That is difficult to compare with, for example, the number of people in the new deal, which is listed not for 16 to 19-year-olds, but for 18 to 24-year-olds. To relate the effect of the new deal on 16 to 19-year-olds is therefore difficult, given the different age groups that are listed. The new deal was said to provide

jobs for 28,000 18 to 24-year-olds, and we talked about 33,000 in the 16 to 19-year-old category. How do the figures relate to each other?

A theme of partnership has come out of today's debate—partnership with the UK Government and the European Union, drawing together resources at those levels, and, at another level, partnership with the voluntary sector and local communities.

Employment and education are crucial in giving people the economic ability to provide civilised lives for themselves and their families. An odd feature that arose from discussions in the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee—which I hope will examine these figures in great detail—was the disparity between the growing opportunities in the building industry as a result of the stock transfer measures, among others, and the lack of desire on the part of many young people to go into that industry.

The policies of the Executive and the Parliament are about creating circumstances in which people can live in reasonable comfort and reasonably civilised conditions with reasonable educational and economic opportunities for themselves and their families. Let us go for it and bring about those aims in greater measure.

16:39

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Labour claims that it is committed to changing people's lives. Indeed, it has changed the lives of many people, but unfortunately not always for the better. Labour has intervened in the lives of Scots and, although I agree with the stated commitment to creating a fairer society where everyone matters, that has not been achieved in the region that I represent. Since Labour has been in power, the difficulties experienced by farmers, crofters, fishermen and the tourist industry in the Highlands and Islands have meant that families are trying to survive on greatly reduced incomes. The unfair fuel prices coupled with the huge increases in water charges exacerbate the climate of despair that many people experience. Where is social justice for those people? Why does rural Scotland suffer social exclusion under a Liberal Democrat-Labour alliance? It is because the Executive refuses to concentrate on the basics of the economy. It refuses to cut red tape and tax and to create job opportunities.

In the annual report, Labour claims to be committed to reducing crime rates in disadvantaged areas. Crime rates should be reduced all over Scotland.

**Mr Rumbles:** The member is painting an awful picture of the period since the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party came together and since the Labour party came to power. Was agriculture in

crisis before 1997 or did the crisis occur after 1997?

**Mr McGrigor:** It seemed to happen immediately after the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party came to power.

The Executive is happy to tell people that crime fell by 9 per cent in Glasgow in 1999. However, it may not be happy to tell people that crime in Scotland overall has risen and that in some regions the crime rate has doubled. In Argyll and Bute, the number of crimes against the person and the number of crimes against property both rose. In the Highlands, drug-related crime increased by more than 200 incidents—an astonishing 23 per cent increase—and crime overall rose by 10 per cent.

If the Executive is uninterested in matters north of the Highland line, it may be more interested in Edinburgh statistics. In Edinburgh, the number of reported crimes rose by almost 10,000, or 21 per cent, and the number of drugs crimes increased by more than 50 per cent. Unfortunately, those trends persist across Scotland. In the Scottish Borders, drugs crimes have risen by an astronomical 110 per cent. Crime has risen in 15 out of the 32 local authorities in Scotland. The Executive can speak about crime reduction all it likes, but its strategy has not worked.

Not only has Executive strategy failed to combat crime, it has failed the young people of Scotland. In 1998-99, the proportion of 16 to 19-year-olds who were not in education, training or employment actually rose, rather than being halved as the Executive had promised. That is hardly a good start. The education strategy has also failed. Where is the social justice for the children whose exam results were messed up?

Here is another fact: far from there being a reduction in the number of unauthorised absences, the number of primary school absences has increased by 130,000. The Executive's target of reducing exclusions—more commonly known as expulsion—from school is misplaced. We should reduce exclusions by changing the culture of behaviour in schools; we should give head teachers and parents the freedom and power to decide what is in the best interests of each pupil in the school on a case-by-case basis. If there is no threat of expulsion, setting blanket targets encourages disruptive children to interrupt the education process.

The Executive seems to think that social justice is to be achieved by pumping more money into programmes that are not working. Instead, it should be focusing on real devolution of power: devolution to individuals and local communities rather than power to politicians; devolution to head teachers and school boards; devolution to local,

smaller housing associations to rid Scotland of bad housing—the legacy of Labour councils; devolution to health care professionals rather than bureaucrats; free personal care for those who need it; and increased pensions and devolution to pensioners to allow them to spend their money on what matters to them. Those measures would increase social justice by empowering people to control their own destinies and by empowering communities to be inclusive, instead of being coerced by a Government that thinks that it has all the answers but clearly does not.

The annual report makes it clear that the Executive has not achieved much so far. Some of its goals are admirable, but many are misplaced. The Executive's motion is self-congratulatory and ignores the real facts—that many of the areas that the Executive focuses on are now worse off than before. The main positive trends shown in the report, such as the move to community care, were started by the Conservatives. There is a long way to go to achieve social justice and equality of opportunity across Scotland.

16:45

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I start by giving a general welcome to the idea of social justice. The ambitious goals set by the Executive are to be admired—they are very aspirational. However, they are based on indicators, targets and measurements. The targets are so vague as to be merely broad statements. The social justice document says that the Executive will assess itself on whether it has increased the

“quality and variety of homes in our most disadvantaged areas.”

How vague is that? How about the Executive being assessed on real targets, such as ending overcrowding, eradicating dampness and ending fuel poverty? I suggest that the target that I quoted is a reflection of the chaos in the Executive's housing policies. The targets are no more than flannel. The real issues are dealt with and the resultant policies are set by the Westminster Government. Employment, fiscal and economic policies are excluded from the powers of this Parliament. That is a great excuse, which the Executive uses over and over to allow it to set easy-to-achieve objectives and then wallow in self-congratulatory trumpet blowing.

It is not only the SNP that recognises that. I enjoyed Donald Gorrie's contribution. He said clearly that benefit reforms were much needed. Would not it be wonderful if we could take that idea by the throat and shake it here in Scotland, rather than having to run down to Westminster all the time? Tommy Sheridan mentioned unemployment and poverty traps, which are a direct result of our benefits system and unfair

taxation system.

My colleague Fiona Hyslop hinted earlier at concerns that the Executive was manipulating targets to suit itself and to make them easier to achieve. That is best illustrated by the watering down of the 50 indicators with specific measurements that were devised by an evaluation framework team, led by Scottish Executive officials. They were watered down into 28 weaker and vaguer social justice targets; the other 22 indicators were ignored altogether. I suggest that those indicators were ignored because they made for uncomfortable reading. I would go so far as to refute as absolute nonsense Wendy Alexander's statement in the debate a year ago.

**Jackie Baillie:** Our approach is based entirely on what the evaluation action team came forward with. I refer Linda Fabiani to the technical document that accompanies the main social justice document; it contains hundreds of measures and indicators of progress.

**Linda Fabiani:** We are considering the headline stuff now. The document also talks about reducing crime rates in disadvantaged areas and about ensuring that communities can live together in safety without being overshadowed by fear of crime. I will go away and look at all this stuff and see whether I can work out just how the Executive will achieve that.

As I was saying, I refute as nonsense Wendy Alexander's statement in the debate a year ago. She said:

"This is the most tightly drawn contract ever between the governed and the Government in Scotland, with its commitments on unemployment, income, education, early years, health and housing."—[*Official Report*, 24 November 1999; Vol 3, c 819-20.]

How will the Executive honour its side of the contract when it has absolutely no power at all to affect the things that could really make a difference?

Regardless of the targets, indicators and measurements, much of what has been said has made worthwhile listening. Sylvia Jackson referred to Mark Shucksmith's report and Richard Lochhead referred to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Mike Rumbles mentioned the real problem of rural poverty and how it can be assessed. I agree that we should have a data bank: great studies have already been done that we could use to build it up. Kenny Gibson talked about urban poverty in Glasgow. We must all recognise that Glasgow is a specific and special case. Everything possible must be done to raise the aspirations of those in disadvantaged areas in Glasgow.

I will not waste much time on the Tories. I was rather annoyed by all that talk of personal

responsibility from a party that set out to disfranchise many Scots in disadvantaged areas and communities. Indeed, I wonder whether the Tories still believe that there is no such thing as communities.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Society.

**Linda Fabiani:** I remind Mr Monteith that society is made up of communities. The problem with the Tories is that they have never realised that.

**Mr Monteith:** I was correcting Linda Fabiani's quotation. If she would care to investigate what Mrs Thatcher actually said, she would find that it was that there are individuals, families and communities. Mrs Thatcher said that there were communities, but that society could not take the blame. If one is going to quote Mrs Thatcher, one should quote her accurately.

**Linda Fabiani:** I will not waste any more time on Mrs Thatcher or Brian Monteith.

Mike Rumbles made a great play of social justice and reform being fundamental to liberalism. If so, what is more important to Mike Rumbles, the principles of liberalism or the Labour-Liberal coalition?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute left.

**Linda Fabiani:** Oh dear. I have so much to say.

I will move on to Fiona Hyslop's amendment. Everyone in the chamber would affirm their commitment to creating a fairer society and to combating poverty. If that commitment is genuine, it follows that the most sensible way to proceed is to set targets and measurements that can be sustained over future Administrations. That can be done only with all-party parliamentary agreement and I remind members that there are six parties in the Scottish Parliament, not just two or three. I take issue with Trish Godman and Johann Lamont, who seem to think that such agreement is a ridiculous concept. They are wrong to scoff. In Ireland, the national anti-poverty strategy was set with cross-party agreement. We should emulate that.

There must be general recognition that some policies are undermining progress on combating poverty in our country. If the Labour back benchers cannot bring themselves to admit that, surely some of the Liberal Democrats can. If they will not lobby Westminster to allow Scotland more powers to benefit its people, they should at least lobby the Government to change the policies at UK level. I urge members to support the SNP amendment.

16:52

**The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran):** We have had an interesting debate: socialism, liberalism and a wee dose of Thatcherism—just to remind us what it was like.

**Mr Monteith:** It was a dose of salts.

**Ms Curran:** I will return to that theme with great pleasure and much criticism.

However, let me start by repeating the points that Jackie Baillie made in her opening speech and those that the First Minister made on Monday at the launch of the social justice annual report.

Poverty and exclusion blight too many lives and affect everyone in Scotland. The problems are not just experienced by some families, in some communities, in some parts of the country. Inequality of income, life chances and opportunity is everyone's problem. That is why we put establishing a comprehensive framework for tackling poverty and injustice at the heart of our programme. We must work together, with all those who share our values. Turning around social problems of the scale that we face will not happen overnight. It is something that we cannot do on our own and we have never implied that we could do it on our own.

The strategy that was set out a year ago contains 29 detailed milestones, supported by an even bigger raft of specific indicators. We are committed to reporting, year on year, on all of those. Our first annual report is now published for all to see, backed by a detailed technical volume giving the background data. That is something that Linda Fabiani should read.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Will Margaret Curran confirm that the baselines to be used in next year's annual report will be the same as those used this year? Does she recognise the serious concern that, if the baselines are shifted, such measurements will be difficult to track year on year?

**Ms Curran:** I was going to turn to Fiona Hyslop's speech first, because it was the most disappointing speech that I have heard in the Parliament. Fiona Hyslop's speeches are sometimes ropy, but that was quite the poorest.

It is irresponsible to talk about fiddled statistics. The data that are collected follow a set of rules for collecting and publishing statistics that is subject to quality assurance to ensure that there is no political interference. The national code of practice on the collection of statistics is very clear about what we are doing. Fiona Hyslop had a problem with only one of the measurements that we are using—she should look at the other 19.

We have been told that the strategy is too easy and too vague. Is ending child poverty easy?

Fiona Hyslop said that we are too unambitious in stating that we will end child poverty in 20 years. She has no grasp of how deep-seated and embedded the problem of poverty is in our communities.

SNP members have told us that they do not like this statistic here or this detail there. None of them told us what they would do to tackle poverty. We heard criticism—I accept that it is appropriate for them to criticise—but, given that we have produced a document that the whole of Scotland can debate and consider, it is incumbent on a political Opposition to say what it would do as an alternative.

I will move on to address the Tories. I have Mrs Thatcher's quotation correct in my speech notes, which say,

"no such thing as society".

It is one thing to say that we must work in partnership. We have made it clear that we work in partnership with the voluntary sector and local authorities, and we are pleased to work in partnership with the British Government as that is what the Scottish people decided that we should do—that is an uncomfortable fact for the SNP to deal with.

**Linda Fabiani:** Will the minister give way?

**Ms Curran:** No. I want to deal with the Tories.

It is right to say that we have to work in partnership and that Government cannot do everything, but abandonment is a completely different policy. The Tories made it quite clear that they are still the Thatcherites that they always were. They talked about rolling back the frontiers of the state and about abandonment, and they will be remembered for that.

**Mr McGrigor:** If the minister wants to achieve equality for all, why was education spending down by £219 million and local authority spending down by £118 million in Labour's first year in power?

**Ms Curran:** Nonsense.

I will deal with one point that came out consistently in Opposition speeches. I remind the Opposition that COSLA told the Executive that it needed £1.2 billion; the Executive gave local authorities £1.2 billion; and, in addition, there was a 57 per cent uplift in capital programme allocations.

I will now discuss something to which I am deeply committed. We cannot solve poverty unless we build into our strategy community empowerment. Building strong, thriving communities is central to our social justice approach. The Executive will support communities to take ownership of their own futures. We want people to speak for themselves and to devolve



decision making on services down to the people who need them.

We are giving power to communities to make decisions and to influence others; building skills, confidence and capacity; getting high-quality and affordable services to communities; closing the digital divide; and developing community control of assets, organisations and enterprises.

Many people in the community and voluntary sectors will have followed this debate. They should know that Jackie Baillie and I remain committed to promoting social justice at grass-roots level. Our efforts are guided by an overarching strategy, but they do not stop there. Our policies will continue to be informed by the reality of life for excluded groups.

I will refer to some other speeches that we heard, as many were telling and worth while. I am pleased that Trish Godman reminded us of our socialist commitments, as I hope that I will maintain my commitment. Much as I have great respect and admiration for Robert Brown and value his contribution, I think that we should recognise that there is a big difference between Drumchapel and Kelvinside. Sylvia Jackson raised important points about mental health, which we will examine.

I have spent some time considering the history of anti-poverty initiatives and have become aware of how many have been derailed because there has not been a proper diagnosis of progress, of what worked, for how long it worked, in what way it worked and what the barriers were. In the past, there have been swatches of analysis about the process of change. That is quite proper, but the emphasis now must be on outcomes. That is what the Executive will expect from those that it funds. We will tackle poverty, exclusion and injustice not by wishing them away, but by systematic resourced action that will be measured, evaluated and improved.

A theme of today, very properly, was rural poverty. I listened carefully to Mike Rumbles and Sylvia Jackson. The paper on rural poverty that is attached to the annual report reminds us that disadvantage is not just an urban problem. We are working to obtain a better picture of the nature and extent of rural poverty. Ross Finnie has established a working group, with which the Executive will continue to work. We will report to Parliament on that. I genuinely wish to move forward on that issue.

We are committed to reporting regularly and transparently on key milestone statistics to ensure that we and our partners have the hard evidence that is needed to review our policies and programmes against measures of success. If the process of monitoring and reporting against the

milestones reveals some areas in which progress is slow, we will be prepared to confront those difficulties. If necessary, we will review our next steps to secure success for our long-term strategy.

That is a key departure. I will quote a distinguished academic, who said:

"These are impressive documents not least because nothing like this has ever been attempted nor have policy makers been so explicit about such a varied range of objectives against which they can be judged. It takes courage to do this. The reports show great determination over a wide range of areas of government activity and also show other agencies what they need to be concentrating on."

We are determined to break the cycle of deprivation and disadvantage. The factors contributing to poverty, deprivation and social exclusion are wide ranging, and our strategy covers economic, educational, health, justice and community issues.

The legacy of injustice has built up over a long time. Our first annual report shows that we are starting to make progress on some of the accumulated problems facing individuals, families and communities. It provides details of the key initiatives that we have put in place to offer help and support to individuals and families that are experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and it aims to prevent problems in the future.

We will be ambitious about our aspirations and honest about their effectiveness. We will work in partnership with the UK Government, local authorities, the voluntary sector and local communities. This has rightly been called a landmark approach, which is appropriate for the first session of the Parliament. It is also appropriate for an Executive in which social justice for all is our abiding commitment.

I speak in all sincerity to the chamber. The loss of Donald Dewar was felt greatly by many in this country, and we still feel it sorely. His influence on our ideas and practice must remain. We will ensure that best by delivering a Parliament with a commitment to social justice at its centre.

## Points of Order

17:03

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Before decision time, I want to respond to the point of order raised by Mr Crawford at the beginning of the ministerial statement. It concerned a newspaper cutting, which he later showed me, and a press release.

I have raised the matter with the Executive and it turns out that an embargoed press release was issued to the evening papers for the later editions. That is perfectly normal practice. However, it appeared in the earlier editions, and the Executive is taking up the matter with the newspaper. I hope that that satisfies the Parliament.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Will you consider issuing guidelines to members on the placing of amendments so that they might have greater success in having their amendments accepted?

**The Presiding Officer:** Funnily enough, I was looking at amendments for tomorrow just before I came to the chamber. I am sorry to disappoint you, but yours has again not been selected. I am not saying that amendments from individual members will never be chosen, but it helps if they have a broad measure of support. I hope that that is sufficient guidance.

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** On a point of order—

**The Minister for Social Justice (Jackie Baillie):** Sit down.

**Michael Russell:** I am sorry that the minister wants me to sit down—this will be helpful to her.

At the end of question time two weeks ago I raised a point of order on the Deloitte & Touche report into the Scottish Qualifications Authority. The report, having been announced in the chamber, was to have come here. You said that you would give a ruling on the matter, Presiding Officer, but you have not done so.

**The Presiding Officer:** I accept your reprimand, Mr Russell, and I will come back with a ruling tomorrow. I must admit that I had forgotten about that point of order—occasionally, even the Presiding Officer has a faulty memory. My ruling might take two minutes out of the time for the SNP debate.

**Michael Russell:** I am sure that those minutes will be worth taking.

## Decision Time

17:05

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The first question is, that amendment S1M-1345.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1345, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on social justice, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)

Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 29, Against 72, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S1M-1345.1, in the name of Bill Aitken, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1345, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on social justice, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)

Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**AGAINST**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 18, Against 83, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that motion S1M-1345, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on social justice, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**FOR**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**AGAINST**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**ABSTENTIONS**

Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 57, Against 19, Abstentions 26.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament welcomes the Executive's publication of the *Social Justice Annual Report 2000*; notes the progress which is being made in tackling poverty and social exclusion, and reaffirms its commitment to creating a fairer society in Scotland, where everyone matters.

## Rail Infrastructure (Glasgow and West Coast)

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S1M-1236, in the name of Ms Sandra White, on rail infrastructure in Glasgow and the west of Scotland. The debate will be concluded, without any question being put, after 30 minutes.

Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak button now. Those who are not staying for the debate should leave as quickly and as quietly as possible—*[Interruption.]* I repeat my request to members who are leaving the chamber to do so quickly and quietly.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament agrees that the transport infrastructure of Glasgow and the West Coast of Scotland suffers from the lack of a direct rail link to Glasgow Airport and a Glasgow north/south rail link; notes that these interrelated schemes would bring benefits to all of Scotland, improving the rail accessibility of all parts of the country, and believes that the Scottish Executive should implement plans and make available the necessary funds for the development of these schemes.

17:09

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I thank MSPs and members of the public who are staying to contribute and listen to the debate.

Although my motion is in two parts, it is about joining those parts together and, by doing so, regenerating vital areas of Glasgow and beyond—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. Members who are leaving should do so without conversing, as a debate is being held.

**Ms White:** I will not repeat my comments, other than to thank the MSPs and members of the public who have stayed behind to listen to the debate.

As I said, although the motion is in two parts, it is essentially about incorporating those two parts and devising a plan that will regenerate vital areas of Glasgow and beyond, ensuring economic progress for people and for the country.

I will begin by talking about the crossrail scheme and explaining what it entails. Crossrail is the collective name that is applied to the north-south rail route across Glasgow, to the Tron line, which is an existing freight line, and to a short section of new track from West Street to link up with the East Kilbride, Barrhead and Cathcart circle lines.

The link has been on the drawing board, believe

it or not, since 1968. I shall give members a brief history. In 1968, the greater Glasgow transport study recommended completion of the line, which required 200 yd of new track at High Street-Bell Street, to connect with existing freight lines. In 1974, British Rail, in conjunction with the local authorities, applied to the Scottish Office to proceed with those recommended projects. In 1975, the Scottish Office refused to go ahead with the crossrail.

In 1991, the completion of Glasgow's north-south missing link was once again revived by Strathclyde Region, enhanced by an additional link from Paisley at West Street. A new Partick-style interchange was proposed for West Street and for Glasgow Cross. In 1995, a provisional parliamentary order was applied for for the crossrail scheme, indicating the seriousness of plans to proceed with the scheme. All members can count, so they will have worked out that it is more than 30 years since the crossrail was first mooted, yet nothing at all has been done about it.

More specific crossrail proposals are on the table, but various transport authorities seem to have put it on the back burner. The shadow strategic rail authority has already offered grant aid towards the £10 million cost. A similar offer has already been accepted for Edinburgh's £9 million crossrail project. Why was Glasgow not considered and why is it being left out?

Let us look at what the crossrail proposals would entail. There would be a connection between High Street-Bell Street and the existing freight lines. That could be up and running in 18 months and would allow all north Glasgow suburban electric trains to run directly on to Paisley, Ayr, Largs, Gourock and Wemyss Bay. The estimated cost of such a project is £10 million. That is a very small cost as far as I am concerned.

The second phase of the scheme would link up with Cathcart, Neilston, Kings Park, East Kilbride and Barrhead. Those places could also be linked into Glasgow airport, which I shall talk about in more detail later. The airport link could be completed as a third phase of the project. The latest figures for the whole crossrail project estimate the cost at £100 million. Compared with the £2 billion cost of the Jubilee line, I do not think that that is an awful lot of money.

What would the crossrail mean for us? Cross-city travel would be enhanced. New interchange stations would be constructed at West Street and High Street, which would increase the number of trips and involve only one simple interchange. It would also provide work for construction workers and help to regenerate the area. City centre access would be enhanced, with new stations providing easy access to High Street, Queen Street and Charing Cross. A new station at

Glasgow Cross would provide enhanced access from the rail network. The Glasgow Cross building, which is very old, was offered to the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive in 1996 for the princely sum of £1 on condition that it be made into a rail station.

I have already mentioned social and economic regeneration. Much of the east and south of the city has become run down and neglected. In many areas, the buildings are derelict. I lodged the motion for this debate because many local residents and traders have written to me asking when the scheme is going to get off the ground. A new station at Glasgow Cross would regenerate the whole area, particularly the east end of Glasgow. It would open up the area not only to local travel but to long-distance travel.

Having covered the crossrail link, I shall go on to talk about what I call the missing link—the Glasgow airport link—which would complement the crossrail proposal. It would enable services to access the airport from the north and west of Glasgow via Springburn, and would link to Edinburgh, Stirling, Aberdeen and beyond. It is a fantastic project, but I do not understand why it never seems to get off the ground. It was first mooted in 1990, with serious proposals first being submitted in 1995. A site has been identified and Railtrack's 2000 network management statement for Scotland details that a rail link to Glasgow airport would cost around £60 million.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport and Railtrack have developed a feasibility study and the Scottish Executive has commissioned consultants to carry out a rail access study. We should favour this proposal. Why do we need the link? It is vital to the economic regeneration not only of Glasgow, but of the surrounding areas and, indeed, of the whole of Scotland.

A study carried out in 1997 by the Association of European Airlines indicated that any airport with 2 million passengers should consider a rail link and that any airport with 3 million passengers should have a rail link. Glasgow has 6.4 million passengers, but to date nothing has been done. In 1991, a rail link to Stansted airport was completed. At that time, Stansted had 1 million passengers. Now, it has 11 million. Last year its passenger lists rose by 17 per cent, while Glasgow's increased by just 2 per cent. It is vital that Glasgow is allowed to compete on equal terms. We want Glasgow to flourish.

I have put forward my arguments as well and as sincerely as I can. I hope that the Executive will take these plans on board and take all the necessary steps to ensure that they come to fruition. As I have already said, £2 billion was spent on the rail link down south. Why cannot we in Glasgow and Scotland access moneys? Like

everyone else in Britain, we pay taxes. We should be entitled to get that money back.

This link is essential, as we do not want to be left behind. I ask the minister to consider the proposal carefully and to give me her answer.

17:16

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** There is much merit in what Sandra White is proposing today. A substantial capital cost is involved, but much of what she suggests is common sense.

We should consider experience elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The Heathrow rail link has proved a tremendous success. The same is true of the links to Gatwick, Stansted and Birmingham. Wherever a rail link has been introduced, there has been a considerable increase in passenger traffic, which provides a boost to the local economy. We should also look overseas—to Charles de Gaulle in Paris and to Köln/Bonn airport in Germany—to see the benefits of having a rail link.

This is not just about tourism. We are anxious to get as much traffic as possible off the roads—for environmental reasons, apart from anything else. If we can get freight travelling from Glasgow airport by rail, so much the better.

I have seldom been convinced by the argument that it would be tremendously expensive or impractical to have a spur from the Paisley canal area to Glasgow airport. It would not be beyond the powers of today's civil engineers to arrange that.

The proposal for crossrail is also common sense. As you will be aware, Presiding Officer, Glasgow Cross is now suffering from a lack of traffic and transport round about, and shops in the area are closing. The crossrail project would represent a significant step towards making that part of Glasgow attractive once again.

Internally, Glasgow's transport links are not that bad. However, as Sandra White has pointed out, there is a missing link. It is very easy to travel from the north-west of the city to the city centre, but it is not terribly easy to travel from the north-west to the south-east—which is what travelling to the airport amounts to. We must establish the link that is needed. When people go on holiday, they do not want inconvenience. When they come to Glasgow from abroad, the first question that confronts them is how to get from the airport to the city centre. We must make that easy for them. Commercially, it is important to ensure that business visitors to Glasgow get in with minimum hassle.

I believe that these projects are worthy of further examination although, inevitably, there is a serious

cost implication. I have no doubt that the minister will address that issue in her response.

17:19

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** This is a timely and highly relevant debate on crossrail and the Glasgow airport link. It is timely against the background of the rail crisis we all suffer when we come through from Glasgow and the dithering that seems to have characterised Strathclyde Passenger Transport's behaviour on both issues in recent years.

Compared with several other areas, the west of Scotland has considerable transport advantages. The existence of SPT is one of them; the Glasgow underground, which was provided as a result of the foresight of our forefathers, is another. As Bill Aitken said, we should set the standard against the quality of public transport elsewhere, especially in Europe. The superb double-decker trains in Switzerland and the highly integrated transport system in Holland are two examples.

Many people have not wakened up to the sheer size of the task of renovating and modernising the rail system in Scotland to bring it into the modern age. I will deal with crossrail first as it is linked to the airport link. At a briefing that I had a while ago with SPT, we were given to understand that progress is dependent on the outcome of a study into the advantages and otherwise of crossrail—which consultants are carrying out—and on a further consultation that is being carried out under the aegis of the UK Government as part of the Scottish airports and air services study.

The trouble is that we have been here before. We can see the importance of connecting the two issues; what we want is a result to those consultations. Crossrail is important in its own right, but it is also a prerequisite for the Glasgow airport link because the economic advantages of that depend on the airport's ability to link to other parts of Scotland.

As Bill Aitken mentioned, it is important that the rail link should be a freight link as well as a passenger link. Imagine the advantages of being able to take off the M8 and the Kingston bridge all the tankers that come from Grangemouth to fuel the aeroplanes that take off from Glasgow airport. We are not considering this with a wide enough scope.

The minister has considerable commitment to the environmental aspects of transport policy and has been resistant to some of the wilder claims on the M74 argument. One of the arguments is that if we have the money to do what is suggested, we should also talk about the finance that would be necessary to provide the public transport links that would achieve many of the social and

environmental benefits that the Government and the Executive seek to bring about.

The message that must go out from this chamber to SPT, the Executive and transport authorities generally is: cut the knot, shorten the timetable and make decisions. They should move ahead so that we can—belatedly—have a proper transport system in Glasgow that links the airport, the traffic arrangements in the city, the people who live in the city and those who wish to come to it. That is long overdue; let us get on with it.

17:23

**Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** I, too, note the contribution that Sandra White has made by bringing this issue to the chamber.

There is cross-party support among Glasgow members for raising another issue about the transport infrastructure of the great city of Glasgow. It is recognised that there is much unfinished business in relation to Glasgow's transport needs.

I echo Bill Aitken's comments that much of Glasgow's transport infrastructure is helpful. In some cases it works against the city's interest in retaining population, because of the relative speed with which people can move in and out of the city from the suburbs.

A fundamental issue is how we use transport developments to regenerate areas of disadvantage. I will speak about how such developments would generate substantial economic development opportunities for the constituency that I serve in the east end of Glasgow and the Gorbals.

A series of interconnections must be made, which have been ignored for a long time. They require the major agencies in the city and the major players such as Railtrack, SPT and the local authorities concerned to produce innovative plans to address the issues that have been raised.

The work of Ken Sutherland and others, who have been assiduous—as all members would testify—in giving information to members about the crossrail project is helpful to this debate. We have an opportunity with the Mercat building at Glasgow Cross, which when we were younger was the place for the Krazy House store. After the exchange that I had with Dorothy-Grace Elder, I think that that is where we should have been earlier in the afternoon.

The issue concerns how we can connect parts of Glasgow that have missed out on the economic prosperity that the city has enjoyed over the past 15 years. A year ago, people would have said that it would be unusual for three local authorities to

have a serious debate with the Executive on the M74 project. That project is now progressing much more quickly than any of us thought possible. We now have the opportunity to bring together the consistent views on Glasgow crossrail. As Sandra White and other members have said, the outline for development already exists. So does the commitment to try to put together a package among transport service providers in the former regional authority area.

We need to bring all the agencies together so that we can match other great cities in the UK—especially Manchester, which made a choice about how it would use its airport link-up with its city-centre transport and rail infrastructure to make a difference. We have the opportunity to do the same in Glasgow. Folk at the ground level in Glasgow are committed to doing that. My former colleague, Alistair Watson, has been helpful in putting together information for this debate and he is one of the key figures who can work with the Executive to deliver that objective.

I welcome this debate. I hope that it is the beginning of a process that will make a difference for the crossrail project and for other projects in Glasgow's transport infrastructure.

17:26

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Frank McAveety just mentioned Ken Sutherland, who has done an excellent job of keeping us informed and, rightly, prodding politicians across the board in fighting Glasgow's cause for improved public transport, especially the crossrail link and direct rail link to Glasgow airport. Ken sent me an article from which I shall quote; the headline is:

"Glasgow Airport looks in line for £27m direct railway link".

This great piece of journalism from *The Herald* informs us that:

"When linked with Crossrail, Glasgow Airport would be accessed easily by rail, not only from north and west of the city, but also from other parts of Scotland, including Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

The airport is fully supportive of the scheme and has stated it would be willing to pay for an element of it, including the costs of the station itself."

That opens up a vista of opportunity, in which Glasgow airport could be accessed not just from Glasgow, but from every other major city in Scotland. That would represent not just regeneration of Glasgow and its airport, but regeneration across the country. The problem is that the article is dated 16 September 1995. It says that the new link

"would not be open until the year 2000."

We have reached 2000 and the link is not there. I



hope that the minister will comment on that.

Much has been said about the cross-party nature of the support for the developments, and I believe that there is genuine cross-party support for the direct rail link to the airport and the crossrail system. However, we have not yet heard what major funding is being made available for those projects. I hope that the minister will give us something tangible today on the delivery of those worthwhile and necessary projects.

17:28

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP):** I thank Sandra White for the labour that she has put into this debate and the excellent statistics that she has produced. While we are on the subject of rail, I am sure that many of us would like to pay tribute to the heroic work of the railway engineers who have been clearing the appalling landslide at Polmont. We may chafe and curse away when our trains are delayed, but those people are risking their lives: the landslide is almost perpendicular and there is heavy, earth-moving equipment on it.

I was lucky in being able to pounce on prospective rail deals when more of the money was going to the east coast. After a campaign, I was fortunate enough to obtain £30 million for new trains on the Glasgow-Aberdeen line.

The world in general is returning to rail; we all know that. French statistics—not ours, unfortunately—show that, despite some of the horrific accidents that have happened recently, people are still 28,000 times less likely to have an accident as a passenger on a train than they are on the roads.

It is quite ridiculous that a city the size of Glasgow does not even have a suburban station at Parkhead. I am pretty sure that there was a station there when I was a youngster, but that was before the years of axing started. We need a station in the east end more than ever, as well as a link to the airport. The situation is very like St Petersburg, where there are potholes on the runway and no rail link to the city's major airport.

Our cross-party Borders rail group was privileged to be visited by a speaker from the mayor's office of Portland, Oregon, who explained that, like San Francisco, the city has turned back to rail to the extent that a new highway was cancelled. Indeed, the places that were linked by the new suburban rail line have prospered. A little conurbation of cafés, shops and one or two light industries was created at every station and halt point, and now those areas are thriving. The city has grown in population and importance and jobs have boomed; people attribute the principal responsibility for that to the intelligent planning of the rail line. They thank the day that they denied

themselves the opportunity of creating another highway.

We all know that there are many excellent suburban lines in France and so on; however, the mindset is different in such countries. I will end with a quick anecdote. We notice that many of the French limbo-dance under station barriers instead of paying their fares; that is part of a socialist mindset in France that believes that the rail belongs to the people. I was once at a Paris suburban station when I noticed that the red carpet had been rolled out. I asked the station master who was expected. "Well," he said, "either it's the President of France or it's the first person that we've caught this year paying their fare."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** I call Jamie McGrigor, but I ask him to keep his speech brief.

17:32

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I will be very brief.

I congratulate Sandra White on securing this debate and agree that a rail link from Glasgow airport would be enormously valuable to most of Scotland, and would open up the Highlands. As usual, I want to introduce a Highlands and Islands perspective. Although there is a good railway from Oban on the west coast to Glasgow, it is quite impossible to travel from west to east. At Crianlarich, the line veers to the right, whereas before the time of Dr Beeching, a line extended through Glenogle to Callander and on to Stirling. The reinstatement of that line would be very advantageous to residents and tourists alike.

I also want to mention Taynuilt railway station, which was the last wooden station on the Oban line and was due to be turned into a museum. Railtrack had promised money to a local trust to achieve that aim, but unfortunately the station was burned to the ground a month ago through arson. I ask the minister to encourage the rebuilding of a replica Taynuilt station, which would be a great tourist attraction in that area.

Will the Executive also give more thought to creating independent loading bays for loading forestry timber on to trains on railway lines in the west of Scotland, to reduce the amount of timber lorries on the roads? That would complement the excellent initiative of carrying timber by sea.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I appreciate the brevity of your speech, Mr McGrigor, but I remind members that speeches should stick a little more closely to the subject under discussion.

17:34

**The Minister for Transport (Sarah Boyack):**

Along with other members, I congratulate Sandra White on securing today's debate. Although it might seem difficult to be positive about the opportunities for rail given the current crisis on the railway network, we need to think to the long term.

As Robert Brown observed, the rail industry has now been posed the huge challenge of restoring public confidence in the safety and reliability of rail travel. We are not talking about quick fixes; the problems are deep-seated and are a consequence of years of under-investment in and fragmentation of the industry. A root-and-branch review of the rail industry's structures and systems, which is now under way in the aftermath of Ladbroke Grove and Hatfield, will result in a railway that is much better equipped to handle progress and manage expansion.

Much is already in place that members should know about. The UK Government's 10-year plan will pump more than £28 billion into the railways over the next decade. The Scottish Executive has committed £150 million to the public transport fund in the next three years. An additional £36 million will be spent on freight facilities grants in the same period—I included that point especially for Mr Jamie McGrigor. We have already committed more than £30 million to the public transport fund—including the £10 million for new projects that I announced last week—and £19 million in freight facilities grants to rail projects in the past two years. We are turning the tide and beginning to invest in our railway network.

The Scottish Executive will take responsibility for the full cost of the ScotRail franchise, worth £200 million this financial year, which includes support for SPT rail services worth £79 million. Stronger regulation of the industry and devolution of important rail responsibilities to Scotland provide us with a much more effective basis on which to develop and implement strategies for growth. That is the context in which we must consider the Glasgow crossrail and links to the airport.

Last month, I outlined my thoughts on the future of Scotland's railways. I want rail to play a key role in an integrated transport system. I want a rail system that is safe and accessible, supports economic development, meets social needs and helps to relieve road congestion. I want to secure more investment in the railway network. I will publish a consultation paper later this month, which will help us to take people's views into account when we set out our guidance and instructions to the strategic rail authority on the Scottish franchise. We have a new strategic context in Scotland that is much more positive for railways; the north-south Glasgow rail links and airport links must be considered in that context.

Our strategic priorities and our directions and guidance to the strategic rail authority will be our statement of how we plan to take forward Scotland's passenger rail system. As I said, Glasgow crossrail and the airport link need to be considered in that light.

Sandra White is absolutely right to say that both projects have been under consideration for at least the past 10 years. They are viewed by many as the missing links in Glasgow's and, by extension, Scotland's rail system. SPT has been the principal promoter of both projects and has commissioned studies to explore options. It has done a great deal of work with Railtrack, Scottish Airports and the British Airports Authority, and plans to do more. I understand that SPT wants to wait for the outcome of that work before it comes to a decision on how to proceed with promoting both projects.

I commend SPT on keeping both projects alive. In the past 10 years, promoting new railways was not an easy task. Many people think that the projects now need to be considered as one project. Indeed, it has been argued that they are much more viable if considered together. The costs are estimated at well in excess of £120 million. A project to link Glasgow Queen Street and Glasgow Central at an estimated cost of £500 million is also being considered. That project is at a much earlier stage of consideration, and many people believe that it will be overtaken by the crossrail airport link project.

A new context in which the Executive can promote railways exists not only in Scotland, but at national level, where national policy supports the need to improve transport links to our city centres and airports. That is why a strategic surface access study is being conducted as part of the Scottish airports and air services study, which is sponsored jointly by the Scottish Executive, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the shadow strategic rail authority. The study is examining the potential for rail links across Scotland at Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness airports, but focuses primarily on the potential rail links from the city centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh, neither of which can be considered in isolation from the other. The study takes the approach that such links are of national significance and must be assessed at national level.

The points made by Robert Brown, Bill Aitken and Frank McAveety highlight the importance of such strategic links. It is right to compare ourselves with other European countries. Scotland and the UK cannot be under any illusion about the catching-up that must be delivered if we are to begin to match the quality and range of infrastructure available at comparable airports abroad. We are also doing multi-modal work on

the M74, which I hope will consider road and rail connections in the round. That is vital, particularly in the context of freight.

Much work is continuing and will be completed shortly. The findings of the airport study will be published early next year, when we will conduct a formal consultation process. It is important that members know what our current time scales are. I share the frustration about past lack of progress on rail projects. They are major infrastructure projects and support will have to be considered alongside other rail and public transport priorities. We need to consider those much more positively.

There is an argument that links to airports might generate commercial returns for the private sector. It is important that we consider opportunities for the private sector to work in partnership with the public sector. Such a joint venture could be an effective way of developing crossrail as a complete and integrated package and might be a way in which to lever in private sector investment. The Scottish Executive has not yet been approached for financial support by SPT or the shadow strategic rail authority. It is important to place that fact on the record. Any future bids from the public transport fund or any other public sector programme will have to be considered against our eligibility criteria and will have to compete with other bids. Another opportunity for considering the projects is the replacement of the ScotRail franchise, on which we will consult later this month. We must consider the projects in the context of the range of choices and opportunities.

The rail projects that can demonstrate benefits and value for money will receive support. That does not mean that there are no tough decisions ahead. It means that the climate in which those decisions will be made has been transformed dramatically. That has been brought about by John Prescott's investment programmes for the rail industry, by the strategic rail authority that will be brought about through the UK Transport Bill, and by our public transport fund. There are now opportunities for real investment. That does not mean that every rail project that someone wants will go ahead; it means that the projects that can demonstrate economic opportunities, social inclusion benefits and environmental advantages are the sorts of projects that, provided with robust analysis and good appraisal, will be considered by the Executive.

The climate has changed. We are no longer managing decline; we are managing expansion of the railways. The challenge for the next few years is to find the best projects to work on. That is the context in which this debate needs to be placed.

*Meeting closed at 17:42.*



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