

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 16 November 2000

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 16 November 2000

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

Points of Order

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Good morning. Before we begin this morning's business, I want to deal with a point of order that was raised yesterday by Michael Russell—I see that he is not with us, but I will deal with it anyway. He said that I had promised to come back to him or to make a ruling on a point of order that he raised two weeks ago. In fact, I did not promise to make a ruling; I said that I would reflect on the matter, and I have been reflecting for two weeks. That is my defence. However, I would like to make a ruling all the same.

There is no standing order requiring the Executive to arrange a debate on matters raised in a ministerial statement. Whether it does so is a matter for the Executive, subject to the approval of Parliament. In addition, the relevant committees have the opportunity to pursue the issues that were raised in the Deloitte & Touche report if they wish to do so, and non-Executive days, such as we are about to have, or committee days may also be used to debate those matters. That is my considered ruling. I see that Mr Russell is now here. I am sorry that he missed the beginning of this gem, but I have dealt with it.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am sorry that I missed it, too.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I have reflected on the points that you made yesterday on my challenge to your ruling. I have checked the amendments for a number of weeks, and it is clear that amendments from single members, or at least from members from one political party, are added to the amendments that are accepted. My good colleague Robin Harper had an amendment accepted three weeks ago, with only his name on it. I hope that you will give some written guidance on the submission of amendments, because there is clearly a divergence in the success rate of amendment acceptance. The amendment that you refused today would have had the effect of providing £150 million extra for council housing in Scotland. It is a shame that you did not accept the amendment, given that I am sure that the mover of the motion would have accepted it.

The Presiding Officer: I will not get into that argument. I gave guidance yesterday; I read it

again this morning in the *Official Report* and it is clear. I said that it is not the case that an individual member can never have an amendment accepted, but the chance of an amendment being accepted depends on two things. One is the scale of support for the amendment and the other is whether there are other amendments. My recollection is that, in the case of Mr Harper's amendment, there were not two other competing amendments. I hope that that is clear. I have to select amendments and make for a sensible debate, and priority is given to those amendments that are shown to have substantial support in the chamber.

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I gave you notice yesterday of the point of order that I am raising this morning. I ask you to rule on whether it would be appropriate in the forthcoming debate for members of the Health and Community Care Committee to use or refer to, obliquely or directly, any material that is in the draft community care report, as that report's conclusions have been discussed but not yet published. The good standing of all committee reports is at risk if committee members are allowed to refer to such material.

The Presiding Officer: I am grateful to you for giving me advance notice of that point of order, Dr Simpson, as that allowed me to reflect on it in advance. My ruling is that there is nothing to prevent members from using material from unpublished committee reports so long as that material has been discussed in public meetings of the committee and is therefore already in the public domain. I warn members before the start of the next debate that they could be in breach of section 9.4 of the "Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament" if they refer to Health and Community Care Committee conclusions and recommendations that have not yet been published. I hope that that ruling is clear.

Community Care

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The first item of business is a Scottish National Party debate on motion S1M-1356, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on community care, and two amendments to the motion.

09:35

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I note that the Minister for Health and Community Care and most Labour, Liberal and Conservative members have not ventured into the chamber this morning. They should not believe everything that they read in the newspapers about the Scottish National Party's new health team.

The subject of the debate will strike a chord with thousands of families across Scotland. It has already provoked much discussion—some of it allegedly heated—among members of the Parliament. Sadly, that discussion has not been about the issues that will be raised today, which I am sure all members deal with daily in our constituencies. Rather strangely, the discussion has focused instead on whether the debate should take place at all.

The Executive amendment asks members to await the publication of the Health and Community Care Committee's report. It is worth while noting that Susan Deacon was not prepared to do that before making her ministerial statement on community care on 5 October. Like my colleagues on the committee, I am not at liberty to comment on the contents of the report prior to its publication. I agree whole-heartedly with the ruling that the Presiding Officer just gave.

As a new member of the Health and Community Care Committee, I am happy to pay tribute to the work that has been done over a long period by past and present members on an issue that is of enormous importance to all of us in Scotland. I make particular mention of my predecessor, Kay Ullrich. On the committee, and more generally, she has done a fantastic amount to highlight the many community care issues that require to be addressed. Kay is no longer a member of the committee, but the report that is published will be in no small part a tribute to her efforts.

I have no doubt that the committee's report will make a substantial contribution to the debate about community care arrangements and I look forward to debating its conclusions in the Parliament in due course. However, the issues that the SNP will raise today are immediate and pressing. They concern real people—some of the most vulnerable in our society—who need care now and cannot access it, and whose inability to

access the care that they need and to which they are entitled will have a knock-on effect for other parts of the national health service, at a time when the pressures on the service are already intolerable. Those issues cannot wait. I do not think that those people, their families or their friends will even begin to understand why so many members of the Parliament have chosen to absent themselves from such an important debate.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): Nicola Sturgeon says that the issues cannot wait. I am puzzled why they could not wait two weeks for a more comprehensive debate that would allow members to reflect on the recommendations of the Health and Community Care Committee. Where were SNP members when the Minister for Health and Community Care gave committee members a briefing? The Tory, Liberal Democrat and Labour members turned up, but no SNP member came to debate the future of health and social care with the minister and her team of advisers.

Nicola Sturgeon: If Hugh Henry cares to wait a few moments, he will find out why this debate is so pressing. He should also acquaint himself with parliamentary procedure, because when the report of the Health and Community Care Committee is published in two weeks' time, it requires to lie for eight weeks to allow an Executive response, thereby ruling out the possibility of a debate in the chamber before Christmas and the winter period.

Hugh Henry *rose—*

Nicola Sturgeon: Not again, Mr Henry.

Hugh Henry: Will the member give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am not prepared to take an intervention from Mr Henry at this stage.

Last month, Christine Grahame lodged a parliamentary question asking how many elderly people in hospital or at home had been assessed as needing a place in a nursing or residential home but whose placements had been deferred by local authorities due to lack of funding. Members may think that that was a simple question, but the reply from the Scottish Executive was that such information was not held centrally—a response that members will recognise as one of a few standard lines that ministers use when they want to avoid answering difficult questions.

Not one to give up, however, Christine Grahame wrote to all local authorities in Scotland, asking them to provide the information that the Scottish Executive was unable or unwilling to provide to the Parliament. The details that she received from councils around the country are deeply disturbing and—I suspect—give us the real reason why so many Labour and Liberal MSPs are reluctant to debate this issue here today.

From the 16 local authorities that have

responded so far to Christine Grahame's inquiry, we have discovered that almost 900 people in Scotland have been assessed as needing residential or nursing care but have not yet been allocated a place; more than two thirds of those people are in hospital beds. If that pattern is repeated in the remaining 16 local authorities, 2,000 elderly people in Scotland will be denied the care that they need at the most vulnerable and fragile time of their lives and their families will be denied the peace of mind that comes from knowing that elderly relatives are being cared for properly. Those figures do not include the thousands more who are waiting for assessments in local authorities around Scotland.

Last week, the Mental Welfare Commission published its annual report, which, although it is about people with mental illness, sums up the situation for everyone who is caught in this position. The report says:

"The commission is aware of many people about whom there is unequivocal agreement that they need residential or nursing home places or other community care but who remain in hospital—either because there is no local authority funding for their placement or because there is disagreement about responsibility for funding. The outcomes of these delays are inappropriate care for patients . . . insecurity and anxiety for them and their relatives"

and

"frustration of the government's community care policy."

The effect on individuals is not the only issue. I have never been keen on the pejorative nature of the term "bedblocking", which tends to stigmatise the patient. Nevertheless, delayed discharge from hospital is a real problem. Every hospital bed that is occupied by someone who needs to be in nursing or residential care instead is a bed that is not available for those who genuinely need hospital care.

Already, we hear reports that 10 per cent of acute beds are blocked. The statistics appear to give credence to those reports, which is hardly the mark of an NHS that is ready for winter and all the pressures that that will bring and is evidence that action must be taken now if the health service is to cope over the next few months of winter.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): As Nicola Sturgeon is three quarters of the way through her allotted time, will she come up with some proposals to support her motion? Unless she does so, she is simply detailing the current situation.

Nicola Sturgeon: I remind Mr Wallace that patience is a virtue.

I dare say that the minister will point to the £10 million that was released to local authorities last month in order to help them to deal with delayed

discharge. There is no doubt that that money was welcome, but it is not enough. For example, in East Ayrshire, of the 64 people who are in hospital waiting for a place in a residential or nursing home, only 25 will be discharged as a result of the extra money provided by the Executive. In North Ayrshire, out of 71 people who are waiting for a place, only 20 will be discharged. Those figures show that many beds will be blocked during the winter. The Government must act now, not in a couple of months when we will have the chance to debate the Health and Community Care Committee's report.

There are also people who remain at home, notwithstanding an assessment that they need residential care. I agree with the thrust of the Executive's policy—where possible, elderly people should be enabled to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. That is what most people want, but there will always be some cases where it is not possible or desirable. People in that situation must also be catered for but, from the evidence that the SNP is presenting to the Parliament today, that is not happening for many of them.

It is not surprising that many local authorities cited lack of available places as the reason why elderly people who have been assessed as requiring care are not being placed. Perhaps the minister should listen to what I am saying, given that there has been a reduction in the number of places in residential care homes since Labour came to power in 1997.

Many people who have been assessed as needing residential or nursing care would be capable of staying at home if the right support existed. The minister has articulated that point on several occasions. Many people are at risk right now, because that support is not provided for those who live in their own homes. Since 1997, the number of hours of home care provided by local authorities has fallen by 7 per cent and 11 per cent fewer people receive home help assistance. The drop in Glasgow over that period is 20 per cent and there are fewer health visitors than there were when John Major was Prime Minister. [*Interruption.*] If Richard Simpson is proud of those figures, he should be ashamed of himself.

The rhetoric of the Government's community care policy simply does not match the action on the ground. Of course, Malcolm Chisholm will talk about the £30 million released for home care, but he should listen to what I am about to say. That money will not be released until next April. Here is an idea for the Government: release that money now to provide adequate home care for people who need it right now, this winter, in their own homes.

I have to tell Mary Scanlon and her party colleagues that, taken on its own, the SNP would absolutely and unequivocally support the amendment lodged by the Conservative party. Unfortunately, the effect of the amendment is to delete the SNP's entire motion. I assume that that is a mistake but, if it is not, it betrays a deep misunderstanding of the issues that Parliament is dealing with this morning. The SNP motion and the Tory amendment are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are mutually supportive.

Implementation of the Sutherland report's recommendation on free personal care would have a positive impact on many of the problems that we are raising in today's debate. Only this morning, before coming to Parliament, I took a call from a member of the public asking me to point out yet again how wrong it is to make elderly people sell their family homes or use their life savings. To make them pay for the basic personal care that many of them require because of old age, frailty or illnesses such as dementia is, in effect, to punish them for having been responsible throughout their lives.

It is about time that the Parliament righted that wrong and it is about time that members were given some clarity about where the Executive stands on implementation of the Sutherland report. Is it the Executive's policy to back the Minister for Health and Community Care when she says that it would not be right to make personal care free at this time? Alternatively, does the Executive support the position of the First Minister, Henry McLeish, when he says that it would not be right to continue with Labour's opposition to free personal care?

That is a basic question, to which everyone in Scotland, especially vulnerable people who require care, deserves to have an answer from the Executive now. I certainly hope that Malcolm Chisholm uses his time this morning wisely and is allowed, at long last, to give the Parliament and the people of Scotland an answer to that question. The question will not go away until the Executive gives us all an answer to it.

The SNP has raised a series of issues that are immediate and pressing for thousands of elderly people and their families throughout Scotland. Those issues must be addressed not in a month's time and not in two months' time, but here and now. It is the duty of any Opposition party in any Parliament to raise such issues. It is a disgrace and an act of contempt, not only for Parliament but for the people of Scotland, that Labour members have absented themselves from today's debate.

The people of Scotland will see that the SNP is raising issues that are important to them. We have put into the domain of Parliament this morning evidence that there is something very wrong with

the Executive's policy on community care. What I want to hear, what the Parliament wants to hear and what the people of Scotland want to hear are some answers from the Executive and a commitment that it is prepared to act now to improve the lives of elderly people across Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament is concerned about the current waiting lists held by local authorities of people in hospital and at home who have been assessed as needing residential and nursing home care but for whom no funding is available; recognises that home care services are inadequate to enable them to safely stay within their own home; notes that most of the additional funding announced by the Minister for Health and Community Care on 5 October 2000 will not be introduced until April 2001 and therefore calls upon the Scottish Executive to bring forward proposals as a matter of urgency to address these issues before the onset of winter.

09:49

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): The SNP motion is right in pointing out that there are still problems with delayed discharges and in recognising that there is a need for more home care services. Where it is wrong is in totally ignoring all the proposals that have been brought forward specifically for this winter, quite apart from the major resources and improvements for future years that were announced on 5 October.

It is nothing short of astonishing that the SNP front benchers—and presumably its back benchers as well—have no knowledge at all of the many measures that have been put in place for the coming winter. We have already put in place a range of specifically targeted measures backed by significant amounts of new money to strike at the heart of some of the problems that have bedevilled the national health service and community care during previous winters. Those measures will establish a firmer base for future service development.

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Malcolm Chisholm refers to the resources that were announced on 5 October. Nicola Sturgeon recognised that resources had been made available, but the evidence from local authorities is that that money will deal with only 25 per cent of waiting lists. What does the minister intend to do about the remaining 75 per cent of people on waiting lists?

Malcolm Chisholm: As I will make clear in a minute, far more than £10 million has been allocated for this winter.

Before I describe the preparations that have been made, I would like to pay tribute to the Health and Community Care Committee for the

work that it has done, which we acknowledge in our amendment. We are all looking forward to seeing the committee's conclusions. I am sure that its report will not only contribute to thinking about policy in this area, but intensify our determination to drive forward change with urgency and focus.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the minister take an intervention?

Malcolm Chisholm: In a minute.

We have made clear our intended direction of travel: to provide maximum benefit to the maximum number of people, especially those in greatest need. We want a person-centred approach that focuses on the needs of individual service users. There will be a drive towards joint, seamless, multi-agency and multidisciplinary working, to ensure the most effective use of the community care pound. In particular, we want joint resourcing and management of all services for older people by 2002 at the latest.

Nicola Sturgeon *rose*—

Malcolm Chisholm: I want to make two more points before I take an intervention from Nicola Sturgeon.

We are determined to improve the quality of care, through our "Aiming for Excellence" proposals and by tying new resources to outcomes. We are also determined to shift the balance of care towards care at home, which all the evidence and research suggest most older people want.

Nicola Sturgeon: The minister mentioned the work of the Health and Community Care Committee. Will he answer a question that Susan Deacon has so far failed to answer? If—and I stress the word "if"—the Health and Community Care Committee recommends full implementation of the Sutherland report, will the Executive go ahead with that?

Hugh Henry: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The member is straying into conjecture and debate about the committee's conclusions. I do not think that that is acceptable, unless all members are allowed to debate the committee's conclusions.

The Presiding Officer: The minister can deal with that.

Malcolm Chisholm: In response to John Swinney last Thursday, the First Minister made it quite clear that the Executive is reviewing its policy on the Sutherland report. There is an important debate to be had about the funding of personal care. However—and this point is also relevant to the Conservative amendment—free personal care would not help us to solve the problems that the SNP is bringing to our attention this morning.

Today's debate is not about the Sutherland report. If pressed, I will restate the Executive's position on the report, but that would be a waste of time.

Before I describe the specific measures for this year, I will remind members of the important announcement that was made on 5 October, which embodied the principles that I outlined a moment ago. For the three years starting in April 2001, we will have flexible rapid response teams in every part of the country to support up to 18,000 older people at home. There will be free home care support for those who need it for up to four weeks following discharge from hospital. There will be 1,000 additional long-term home care packages for those in greatest need and 22,000 extra weeks of respite care. There will be a local service in every part of the country for shopping, laundry and minor household repairs. Formal guidance on charging for home care will be issued, to be used if the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities initiative to reduce variation does not achieve the desired result.

Perhaps the thought of all those significant new resources and initiatives has taken the Opposition's eye off the ball in the current year. I assure the Opposition that the Executive's eye is firmly fixed on what needs to be done now for this winter.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: If I have time, I will take another intervention, but I want to devote the second half of my speech to what we are doing now for this winter.

Back in the spring, the Executive recognised the need to learn from the experiences of the NHS and local authorities last winter and to make full and adequate preparations for the coming winter. It should come as no surprise to anyone that additional capacity in health and social care will be needed over the winter months. We know that winter puts real pressure on the NHS and on social services. We are talking about day-to-day events. Hospital admissions always rise in the winter. Flu can strike unpredictably. Icy weather leads to accidents and broken bones, and staff get sick more often. The Executive's aim is to ensure that these events do not cause health and social services to break down. To ensure that the NHS manages its way through the inevitable pressures, in July about £10 million was allocated to the service so that it could take forward winter planning work and put appropriate arrangements in place. That was new money within the wider allocation for modernisation that was allocated to all health boards at that time.

Nicola Sturgeon *rose*—

Malcolm Chisholm: I must press on. I have only four minutes to cover a lot of territory.

A winter performance group was established in the spring and it reported in August. A seminar held in September acted as a springboard for further work by health boards, trusts and local authority social work departments. We now have winter plans from all health board areas—with input from trusts and social work departments—which are being assessed by a service-led panel. A great deal of work has been done by all agencies to make preparations.

Examples of the services are: ensuring that complementary general practitioner and pharmacy services are available out of hours, over weekends and at Christmas and new year; expanding use of rapid response teams; a review of hospital admissions procedures to ensure that potential admissions are dealt with in the community wherever possible; expanding the number of acute beds and associated staffing; increasing the number of critical care beds; and reviewing plans for elective procedures to allow capacity for emergency admissions. A winter panel has also been established to review winter planning arrangements and monitor developments ever more intensely as winter unfolds.

Nicola Sturgeon: Does Malcolm Chisholm care to answer Dr Anthony Toft, consultant physician at the Edinburgh royal infirmary? Dr Toft said:

"I suspect we won't cope this winter . . . The feeling among doctors is that although plans have been made, these plans will prove inadequate."

Malcolm Chisholm: I have talked to Dr Toft on more than one occasion and have the highest respect for him. It is generally recognised that he is in a minority on many aspects of health policy. Dr Bill O'Neill, the Scottish secretary of the British Medical Association, said:

"We have never been better prepared for winter than we are this year . . . I think we have had better planning and we are better prepared this year than we have ever been in the past."

I was going to say more about flu immunisation but, as I have only two minutes left, I will just remind members of the £10 million that has been put into the programme for it. I hope that every member of the Parliament will take seriously the message that is being promoted through our television and newspaper advertisements and encourage all their constituents who fall into the appropriate categories to take the time to go to their GP and have the flu jab.

Nicola Sturgeon made a point about not knowing the numbers for delayed discharges. The Executive has ensured that we will soon know the numbers because the first ever census has been taken. At the end of November, we will have the first figures. Nicola Sturgeon gave the figure of 2,000; the unofficial figure when Labour came into power in 1997 was a lot more than that.

The SNP motion refers to people waiting for admission to nursing or residential care after assessment. We agree that there are unacceptable delays and clearly action has to be—and is being—taken. We have allocated £19 million in the current financial year to local authorities and to the NHS specifically to tackle delayed discharges from hospital. That money went out in response to plans that the NHS and local authorities submitted.

Shona Robison: Will Malcolm Chisholm give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I have only a minute left, so I must press on.

Those plans have now been improved and are being put into effect. Apart from providing resources and monitoring development, we have also set up a service-led learning network to disseminate good practice and be a catalyst for change.

The final aspect of current expenditure for this year that I will mention is equipment and adaptations. We estimate that around 10,000 people who have been assessed as needing some kind of equipment or adaptation are on a waiting list. Another 10,000 or so are waiting for their assessment. That is unacceptable. Susan Deacon has already announced that we intend to allocate £5 million specifically for equipment and adaptations in the current year to help to tackle that backlog of people.

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP) rose—

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Malcolm Chisholm: I am out of time.

When the money for this year is added up, it amounts to £44 million specifically to address the problems that the SNP motion refers to. That means that the SNP's suggestion that nothing has been done and that we need to produce proposals is nonsense. We have the winter money of £44 million and we have the extra money that was announced on 5 October, which will be £100 million in year 3.

Other community care announcements will be made that involve additional money. A great deal of action is being taken. We are not complacent. We recognise that the problem will take some time to deal with; it has existed for three decades. As Susan Deacon said at the Health and Community Care Committee two or three weeks ago, it may take more than a year to deal with it. Significant action is being taken this year and significant progress will be made. I reject the SNP motion.

I move amendment S1M-1356.1, to leave out from "is concerned" to end and insert:

"notes that the Health and Community Care Committee is

conducting an inquiry into Community Care and believes it is appropriate that the Parliament awaits the outcome of the Committee's conclusions."

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that they should not ask other members to take interventions when they have gone beyond their time limit. The minister was in injury time for interventions that he had already taken when Mr Gibson tried to intervene.

10:00

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I find it quite insulting that Nicola Sturgeon stands up to declare the issues as though she had suddenly discovered them. When the Health and Community Care Committee first met in June 1999, we drew up a list of priorities that we thought should be addressed in the new Parliament. Many concerns were expressed, but the overriding priority was care in the community for the elderly, the disabled and the mentally ill. That priority was agreed unanimously by committee members.

Over the 10 months of our wide-ranging inquiry, we heard evidence from people throughout Scotland—from carers to royal colleges, from the decision makers and from those who depend on the services. We not only heard evidence, but got out there to see how the service worked. We witnessed the attitudes and cultures that exist and we heard stories that we will probably never forget. That allowed us to compile a cross-party report that is a tribute to the committee and a document of which the Parliament can justly be proud.

In that vein, I was keen to visit the Western Isles to engage with the different structure of services, the smaller population and the traditional culture. I must admit that, if I had had to choose a companion for that week, from this chamber, Margaret Jamieson would probably have been near the bottom of my list; the dark islands became less appealing by the minute when Margaret suggested that she would come along. However, as we pursued similar lines of questioning it quickly became apparent that the dignified care of the elderly, the disabled and the mentally ill was—in our book—well above party politics. Across the political divide, our views may differ on the means of achieving the objectives, but identifying the problems and applying the principles to them was never a problem.

It was quite a shock to those whom we met that Duncan Hamilton, Margaret Jamieson and I could work as a team and put the health of the people of the Western Isles well above party politics. Duncan Hamilton has received various jibes in the chamber about his age, but in my opinion Duncan has wisdom and compassion beyond his years.

[*Applause.*] That is quite true. The people of Scotland have the right to expect the Parliament to put their health care needs above party politics, and I am proud that the Health and Community Care Committee achieved that.

It is therefore with sadness rather than anger that I turn to the SNP motion. As our confidential committee report makes several recommendations on tackling the problems that have been raised, and other recommendations that impact indirectly on the subject of the motion, I cannot speak of those recommendations. I can only move the amendment that is consistent with our approach in previous debates on the funding of personal care and the monitoring of council spending. I look forward to the frank and full debate that will take place in January following publication of the Health and Community Care Committee's community care report and the Executive's response to that report's extensive list of recommendations.

I do not want the Executive to come back within 24 or 36 hours with a quick-fix response to a serious problem. The extensive list of recommendations in the committee's report requires a measured, considered, detailed and financially focused response, which will take time. I find it insulting to all members of the Health and Community Care Committee that this subject has been chosen for debate only days before the publication of a report that has been 10 months in the making.

Nicola Sturgeon is right, however, to say that something is very wrong, and I acknowledge that local authorities have a serious problem with the difficulty that they face over home care. Given the SNP's choice of subject today, we might assume that that party's urgent concerns would be a major priority in Angus Council. Such is the commitment of that SNP council to care in the community that, this week, it proposed a novel approach. *The Courier and Advertiser* reported on Tuesday:

"One of the main proposals . . . was a plan to phase out local authority home care services and replace them with a voluntary organisation.

Social work director Bill Robertson admitted yesterday that such an option could not be achieved . . . He said that under a move away from council-run home helps, nearly 900 people would no longer receive care . . . this would mean an unacceptable risk was being transferred to a voluntary organisation."

That is SNP policy. Thank goodness that the good folk of Angus have a caring social work director to look after their interests, because they certainly cannot depend on their SNP councillors. I suggest that before SNP members preach to others, they get their own house in order.

I move amendment S1M-1356.2, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"agrees that the best way forward is the eventual

implementation of the Sutherland Commission's recommendation of free personal care, and urges the Scottish Executive to monitor the use of new monies allocated to local authorities for community care in light of winter pressure to ensure that the elderly receive the appropriate care and support."

10:06

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): Anyone who has examined the complex issue of community care will agree that many of the problems that are mentioned in the SNP motion can be tackled through joint working and multidisciplinary team working. Over the past year and a half, it has been my privilege to lead a multidisciplinary team of members whom I respect such as Kay Ullrich and our very wise Duncan Hamilton—although I think that Mary Scanlon's comment spells the end of Duncan's career. Some of the tales of that team will probably not emerge in next week's committee report on community care; they will probably have to wait for the memoirs of Mary Scanlon, Margaret Jamieson and Duncan Hamilton.

The serious point is that Mary Scanlon is right. When committee members first got together, we decided to make community care our No 1 priority. We found that the issue kept cropping up in our individual surgeries; indeed, the point that kept cropping up was that the problems that are identified in the SNP motion definitely exist and must be tackled.

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): Margaret Smith mentioned Mary Scanlon, who said that there would be a debate on this issue in January. Does she accept that, as we fast approach winter, issues must be debated and dealt with here and now, and that action must be taken to help the frail elderly?

Mrs Smith: Speaking personally, and not for my party, I would have preferred today's debate to have been delayed for two weeks. That would have allowed us to see—[*Interruption.*] Well, if the SNP had asked for such a delay, I am sure that the business managers of the other parties and the Presiding Officer would have looked on the suggestion favourably. Such a delay would have allowed us to consider the contents of not only the Health and Community Care Committee's report, but the joint futures group report; as Kay Ullrich knows, that group is part of the way in which the Executive has been investigating the problem of integrating services and making people work together. Both reports are due to be published in the next fortnight. Furthermore, through Mr McLeish's teasing press releases, we know that a policy review is under way. In the light of those facts, I would have preferred to delay the debate for two weeks.

As for committee reports, it is right that we have to wait eight weeks for a full response from the Executive. However, it would have been possible for the Executive to make a partial response, perhaps in the same way that the minister, Malcolm Chisholm, has contributed to today's debate. The problem with today's debate is not the Executive's response, but the fact that I cannot stand here and say what I feel, what I want, and what I think is right based on my experiences over 10 months of my life.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Margaret Smith give way?

Mrs Smith: No, I want to finish this point.

It is absolutely impossible for every member of my committee—including the new members—to discuss this issue in the round. Today, Nicola Sturgeon has simply highlighted the problems. Part of the reason for that is that the SNP cannot suggest any of the solutions that are contained in the committee report, because the report cannot be talked about. That makes the debate difficult. Every member of the committee who has talked to me feels constrained by their inability to talk about what we have been talking about for 10 months, namely, conclusions, answers and solutions, not problems—we all know what the problems are.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Margaret Smith confirm that what she is saying to the approximately 2,000 elderly people in Scotland who are in inappropriate care settings and need the Parliament's help is that she is sorry, but there is nothing that the Scottish Parliament can do to alleviate their problems because we have to wait two months to be able to debate a community care report?

Mrs Smith: Absolutely not. Nobody in the chamber is in any doubt about my views on community care or my passionate concern. I am saying that the debate would have benefited from being delayed by no more than two weeks; it could then have benefited from 10 months of work by colleagues of all parties, who have worked together, showing respect, in the way that Mary Scanlon outlined. That would have added not only to the debate, but to the pressure on the Executive. My aim is not to let the Executive off the hook. If I were about letting the Executive off the hook, I would have voted with my party and with the Executive in the debate a few weeks ago. I am not in the business of letting anybody off the hook on community care and, at the end of the day, our work will reflect that.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Mrs Smith: No.

Once again, we have heard nothing new from the SNP today. A few weeks ago, the Minister for Health and Community Care came before the

committee and answered questions from us all about the plans to deal with winter pressures. We know that there are all sorts of complex reasons for winter pressures. If we are honest, we also know that the Executive is at least attempting to tackle them. It may not get its response right but, as the minister said, it took 25 years to develop some of the problems so it will take more than a couple of years to get the answer right. The Executive is moving towards getting it right.

Feelings ran strongly in the debate on community care in September. The minister acknowledged some of the problems on 5 October, and I remember what she announced: £25 million to make nursing care free wherever it was obtained; £5 million for household adaptations; £3 million for needs assessments and £126 million over three years to improve home care provision. That is not to mention the two tranches of funding—£70 million—to deal with delayed discharge, which the minister announced earlier in the year.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way on that point?

Mrs Smith: No.

The winter pressure measures on which we questioned the minister two weeks ago are in place. We will monitor them, the Executive will monitor them, we will see whether they work and the Executive will learn from experience, as it learned from last year's sad experience of flu and winter pressures. Compare that approach with the SNP's commitment under its penny for Scotland proposals of £30 million over three years in new resources for community care. Compare the Executive's action with that of Angus Council, as outlined by Mary Scanlon.

Today's debate is not about community care. The reason why the SNP did not delay the debate by a week or two was that it could not delay the Anniesland by-election. The problems have been highlighted time and again. I believe that the reports from the Health and Community Care Committee and the joint futures group will examine many of the issues that concern MSPs across the chamber, and that we will learn a lot from those reports. All of us who care passionately about community care and who have given 10 months to the issue—not one and a half weeks—will keep up pressure on the Executive to ensure that the problems are tackled.

I have had no alternative today but to decline to comment on some aspects of community care that I would have wanted to comment on and will comment on in future. We shall meet again on this subject—the issues will be debated again and we will find solutions. However, today, out of respect for my colleagues and for a committee system in

which I believe and which I take seriously, I have not been allowed to talk about the recommendations in what I believe will be a good report.

10:15

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Before I deal with the home help service, I want to respond to Mary Scanlon. The Health and Community Care Committee might have been conducting an inquiry for the past 10 months, but I recall that, on 28 September, we debated a Conservative motion that called for the implementation of free personal care, in line with the Conservative party's policy. I do not think that Mary Scanlon is in a position to castigate the SNP for its choice of debate.

I see that Margaret Smith has such concern for the debate that she has left the chamber. She, and all other members, should bear in mind the fact that the SNP and the other non-Executive parties have certain days when we can debate subjects of our choice. Our choice of subject and the timing of the debate on that subject is a matter for us alone. We will not be dictated to by any other party in the chamber.

Hugh Henry: On a point of order. Is not it a matter for the Parliament, rather than for a political party, to decide what is debated?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I believe that the SNP had the right to call this debate.

Tricia Marwick: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I wish that Mr Henry would acquaint himself with the facts before making a point of order. The fact is that the SNP and other parties in the chamber have the right to call debates on subjects of their choice. That has nothing to do with other parties.

The home help service is vital in allowing people to remain in their homes. The Labour MSPs turn their back not on the debate and not on the SNP, but on some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland. I am hardly surprised that they do not have the guts to come here and say that.

Sometimes, I think that the Executive ministers live in—

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): On a point of order.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a point of order from Margaret Jamieson.

Margaret Jamieson: I apologise, Presiding Officer. I meant to ask whether Tricia Marwick would take an intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let us clarify that. Will Tricia Marwick take an intervention?

Tricia Marwick: I will.

Margaret Jamieson: When the Health and Community Care Committee had a discussion with the Minister for Health and Community Care, no members of the SNP were there. Will Tricia Marwick explain how that fits with what she has been saying?

Tricia Marwick: I am speaking in the debate not as a member of the Health and Community Care Committee, but as a member of the Scottish Parliament. Other members care as much as members of the Health and Community Care Committee about home care services, home helps and all the rest of it. The SNP is having this debate to give MSPs who are not members of the Health and Community Care Committee the opportunity to debate issues that are of concern to us all.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Tricia Marwick: I would like to, but I have not even started my speech yet.

Sometimes, I think that the Executive ministers live in a parallel universe. We heard Malcolm Chisholm say that extra money has been put into council services and home care, but those services have experienced cuts in every year that the new Labour Government has been in power. That is what I am being told every day of the week—I suspect that Labour back benchers are being told the same thing—by senior citizens, their families, doctors, nurses and home carers. Is it just possible that all of those who provide the services, all of those who need the services and all of those who use the services are wrong and that ministers are right? I do not think so.

I will quote from a letter that was written last year by a Fife Council official:

"We fully appreciate the importance of providing a service to the perceived low need category and there is much researched evidence to support this view. However, in the current financial climate, I am unable to respond to these situations as we have done in the past."

That is a direct reference to the fact that Fife Council now prioritises home help services to different groups. The only people who can get home help services now in Fife are those who are terminally ill and have been discharged from hospital. All the rest are on a waiting list. For the first time, Fife Council has a waiting list for home health care services. That is a disgrace—even under the Conservative Government we never had a waiting list for home helps.

Fife Council is a Labour council, and we have a Labour Executive working to a Labour Westminster Government. When I visited a group of general practitioners in Fife, I was told that the situation was totally unacceptable and that patients were already suffering because of a lack

of social care.

Malcolm Chisholm and other ministers have to address such issues now, not at some time in the future. They have to address the real health care needs of people in Fife and elsewhere in Scotland.

10:20

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): As a member of the Health and Community Care Committee, I have great difficulty in contributing to the debate because, like other members of that committee, I am constrained in what I can say.

It is right to acknowledge the cross-party work that the committee has done since we were told on 6 October last year that we would embark on an inquiry into community care throughout Scotland. Kay Ullrich will remember that our Christmas reading was contained in two huge white folders. We were expected to use the recess—that is a wonderful term—to ensure that our knowledge was fully up to date and that we could make a good start to the inquiry at the beginning of the year.

Since then, the committee has heard oral evidence from 18 organisations and received written evidence from 80 organisations, and members have undertaken visits to 10 areas. I will not go into the details of our visit to the Western Isles, as Duncan Hamilton will agree that our credibility has gone down as a result of it. We did not go to those areas with answers, as we wanted the people whom we visited to provide us with those. I believe firmly that the committee report will give answers, and that not all of them will be political; they will be practical solutions.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Margaret Jamieson: No.

The people who need and use the service can tell us how it should be delivered and how it should be client centred. We need to recognise that community care is not all in the gift of local government or the health service. During the inquiry, I learned that there is a desire for joint working and that the barriers that prevent joint working must be removed by statute or some other means to ensure that we deliver for the people of Scotland.

There is no quick fix—financial or otherwise—that will deliver quality care in the community. We need to consider the preventive measures that can be taken to ensure that people are not placed inappropriately in acute hospitals. We have discussed such questions before, and I make no apology for mentioning again Newmilns and Darvel in my constituency, where GPs, nursing staff and others got together to ensure that such

inappropriate placement did not happen. We also have rapid response teams, which are being recognised throughout Scotland as a way forward; we must allow them to develop.

Kay Ullrich: Will the member give way?

Margaret Jamieson: No.

This is not all about money. Some projects have not cost one extra penny, but have made professionals examine whether the way that they deliver services is the best way and, if it is not, change it.

We also have the nursing care stakeholders group, of which the chief nursing officer is a member. That group is examining ways of defining nursing care. Only when that definition has been set will we be able to consider measures to ensure that there is appropriate personal care.

It is unfortunate that Nicola Sturgeon and her SNP colleagues do not wish to be involved in the joint work that is so evident throughout Scotland. I ask Nicola Sturgeon in particular—I am sorry that she is not here to hear me—to take a leaf out of Kay Ullrich's book and to work together for the benefit of all.

10:25

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): I remember last Christmas ploughing through the files of statistics that Margaret Jamieson mentioned. For me, it was one up on the previous Christmas when I had to plough through Scottish sewerage statistics. I have gone up in the world from studying toxic dumping.

The Health and Community Care Committee has put a lot of hard work into its forthcoming report and I am constrained—a condition to which I am utterly unaccustomed—and cannot be outspoken. However, the false facade on so-called care in the community that we all know exists in all parties is being torn down. "Care in the community" is a term that Mrs Thatcher invented. It is not working; people of good will and good sense in all parties know that.

In the Health and Community Care Committee, we have worked together harmoniously, although I was not on the fabled visit to the Western Isles. Some of us got to only a few away days, so we are envious. A genuine desire to right wrongs has been common to all members of the committee. Committee members have repeatedly pressed on the Executive the need for a sense of urgency, both in public and behind the scenes.

Eighteen months after the Parliament was created, what is happening at grass-roots level? In common with most MSPs, I hear the most desperate pleas at surgeries from social work

clients and their relatives. MSPs should compile a dossier on threatened projects around Scotland. Let us get together to do that and submit the dossier to the Health and Community Care Committee.

I work mainly in the east end of Glasgow, which has three of the poorest constituencies in Britain, yet the cuts in community care have been most savage there. Just a few months ago, I was called out because of the closure of Easterhill Day Centre in Baillieston, which was a centre for adults who are multiply disabled and cared for by increasingly aging parents. Social work chiefs told those people that the centre was closing because they had to save money. There was no consultation whatsoever.

Just a week or so ago, I was next door to that closed centre because Baillieston community care project is now in imminent danger of closure. The project runs a day care home service to look after people in their own homes as well as a day care centre. The project cannot pay its wages bill of £11,000 this month. I have drawn that to the attention of the First Minister and he is, I think, sympathetic. I believe that the council may restore some money that the project is owed, but that will save the situation only until December and will mean living hand to mouth.

The centre sends people out to help incredibly vulnerable people in their own homes. One case is of an 87-year-old woman caring for her 100-year-old sister, who suffers from dementia. Imagine the effect on those people of being told that their only source of help may close within a couple of weeks because of insecurity of funding. That is the funding crisis we hear of all over Scotland. Think of that 100-year-old woman, born at the beginning of the previous century. She would have started work at age 14, as the first world war broke out. She has contributed to society for between 70 and 80 years, experienced two world wars and raised a family. What are we saying to her now? That the one thing that she has left in this world, the loving care of her sister, will have to go.

If the daily helper goes, the sisters will be split up after 87 years together. I do not think that our Parliament was created to oversee such inhumanity. I urge the Executive to set up emergency bridging funding for threatened projects, and not to wait until spring comes, when it will be too late. Emergency bridging funding would be a sensible alternative. The Executive should also consider the money that has been gained through selling off hospital real estate. That money was supposed to be ploughed back into community care; I do not think that it has been. Please ensure that it is.

10:30

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Like others, I would like to condemn the opportunistic nature of the SNP motion and its attempt to reinvent the wheel. I suspect that people such as Kay Ullrich and Christine Grahame must find it rather patronising.

I would like to make some points about balance. In the care in the community programme, almost excessive efforts are being made to keep people in their own homes in South Ayrshire. Visiting Mathieson House in Ayr last Saturday, I was struck by how content the ladies are to live there. They enjoy the sense of security, they enjoy each other's company and they enjoy the food that is prepared for them by caring staff. They are more comfortable than they would be in their own homes. Houses such as that one are under threat, because social work departments are making such huge efforts to keep elderly people at home when perhaps—I repeat, perhaps—it is not always in the best interests of the people concerned. We are in real danger of losing those publicly and privately funded residential homes—which would be throwing the baby out with the bath water—because of a doctrinaire approach to looking after the elderly.

Furthermore, the withdrawal of warden services from sheltered housing in my constituency is part and parcel of encouraging the elderly to stay at home and not move into sheltered housing. Sheltered housing is no longer what it was; it is no longer as sheltered as it was. I have been asked whether those houses can now be bought from the council because they no longer meet the criteria of sheltered housing—they are council houses or flats. I would be interested to hear the minister's opinion.

Every day we hear about money flowing into the health service, yet for many people it seems to be getting harder to access the most basic services. In my constituency, podiatry care that was previously available to the elderly is no longer available. Lunch clubs for the elderly that were previously funded by the council are now being delivered by volunteers and the churches. The sense of community that those clubs engendered is under threat. It appears that the Government is setting out to destroy it and I cannot understand why. Imagine the outcry that there would have been if, during these three short years, the Conservatives had achieved such cuts.

I understand the current idea of caring for every individual in their own home, but the law of unintended consequences is at work here. What is being delivered is a reduction in choice in care for the elderly—the closure of good public and private residential care homes and the reduction in value to the individual of sheltered housing. The loss of venues such as the Carrick Street halls affects

communities—virtual communities, to use the word in its old-fashioned sense.

Shona Robison: Given the real concerns that the member has outlined, does he agree that the SNP was right to give him the opportunity to raise such concerns?

John Scott: These matters will be discussed in a fortnight's time when the Health and Community Care Committee's report comes out. I am more than happy with that. It is the correct procedure.

The loss of venues produces a less contented group of elderly people and a more vociferous group demanding that its basic human needs be met. Once again, as with so much new Labour policy, this policy suggests that all the generations that went before were either naive or stupid, when demonstrably they were not. That is why I applaud the diligent and measured approach of the Health and Community Care Committee over the past year. I urge the Executive to produce a balanced report in a fortnight's time. I urge members to support the Conservative amendment.

10:35

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I do not want to get involved in the debate about motions; I want to discuss respite care. I welcome the packages that were announced in Susan Deacon's recent statement, particularly the 22,000 extra weeks of respite care.

Recently, a constituent drew to my attention the fact that even when respite care is needed and funding is available, there is a great shortage of places for respite care. Nursing homes are closing and institutions are unwilling to make places available for respite care on a weekly basis. They prefer to wait for long-term patients. I am delighted that the funding has come through, because that has been a stumbling block. However, we must consider the issue structurally and ensure that there are places available for respite care.

I would like to emphasise the importance of day care, which was not prominent in the Sutherland report or in Susan Deacon's announcement. I have a paper that I sent to Malcolm Chisholm and Margaret Smith, which was sent to me by the organiser of the Broomhill day centre in Penicuik, a redoubtable lady called Tilly Suttle. She has harangued Iain Gray and is making a strong case for day care to be considered as a statutory responsibility. Currently, the funding for her centre comes from Midlothian Council, but it is not statutory. Many people are referred to the centre through health professionals. Joint futures and funding will be very important, but it must provide some stability. Day care does much good, but is currently undervalued and underfunded. It is a vital link. It reduces hospital and social work costs. Tilly

Suttle provides day care at about one sixth of the cost of the same service provided by Midlothian home care services.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I received the same paper as Ian Jenkins and I support everything that he says. However, he should know that I asked the minister to make day care centres a statutory requirement of local authorities and that the minister said no. Does Ian Jenkins support me in pursuing the point that day care centres should be a statutory responsibility of local authorities because they are essential in allowing people to stay in their own homes, but ensuring that those people are in the community and not just stuck in their homes?

Ian Jenkins: I support Tilly Suttle in her drive to increase the value that we give to day care. There is a debate to be had on the matter.

Iain Gray has told me that there are moves to raise the profile of day care and I hope that something comes of that. People need to be secure in the knowledge that such provision is available.

I commend the paper to Malcolm Chisholm and I recommend that other members read it. I have no doubt that day care provision is valuable or that it has so far been undervalued.

10:39

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I am disappointed, but hardly surprised, by the opportunism of the SNP. What we have seen today is posturing in anticipation of the Anniesland by-election. Several SNP members commented on attendance being equal to concern, but we still have to get an answer from the SNP on why no SNP members turned up to discuss health and community care with the Minister for Health and Community Care and her team. I suspect that the answer is that there was no press there, so there were no opportunities for them to make political capital. That is the reality. It was hard work. It was a detailed and sensible discussion, which does not sit easily with the SNP.

Nicola Sturgeon: Can Hugh Henry confirm that at the time of the briefing that he referred to, neither I nor Shona Robison were members of the Health and Community Care Committee—yes or no?

Hugh Henry: If that is the case, there were other members of the Health and Community Care Committee who are members of the SNP and they failed to turn up, so Nicola Sturgeon should address that issue within her party.

This issue fits with other attempts by the SNP to undermine cross-party work. I think back to the debate on Mike Tyson coming to Scotland,

when—

Tricia Marwick: On a point of order. The Presiding Officer gave us clear instructions on where we should not stray today. Hugh Henry is in serious danger of straying from the motion. He is getting into other issues that are not part of this debate. Given that time is short, could you ask him to concentrate his remarks on the debate that we are having?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The Presiding Officer's judgment was specific to what was said in committee. Hugh Henry is illustrating a point. I ask him to do so briefly.

Hugh Henry: What has happened is a blow to the committee system and to the independent scrutiny that committees perform. This debate puts those of us who are members of the Health and Community Care Committee at a severe disadvantage in trying to have a sensible debate. I appeal to you, Presiding Officer, on behalf of Parliament and the committees, to intercede with the Parliamentary Bureau so that when business is being planned for the future, the valuable work of committees is never again undermined in this way.

There is a good-news story to tell about community care but, equally, there are concerns to be expressed. Malcolm Chisholm was right to speak about the extra £44 million that is being put into the NHS this year to move matters forward. That contrasts, as Margaret Smith said, to the £30 million over three years that was promised by the SNP. [MEMBERS: "An extra £30 million."] We can clearly see the difference in priorities as far as community care is concerned.

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): On that point, does Hugh Henry agree that the SNP completely missed the fact that there are two streams of money? There is a stream through health boards. In my area, Forth Valley Health Board has allocated £800,000 to care of the elderly this year. Separate from that, there is a stream through local authorities amounting to £10 million. Those resources have been used to release beds and provide a rapid response to prevent those beds from becoming blocked again.

Hugh Henry: I note Richard Simpson's point. Money is going in, but this is not just about money. There are structural and organisational issues that need to be addressed. Over the past week, I have struggled to help my mother to come out of hospital, return to her home and look for services. The problems that my family and I have faced are not specifically about money; they are about the response of the local authority, communications between the different agencies that are involved, and getting an appropriate response within a time that is suitable for my mother, my father and the

rest of the family. We have to resolve those organisational issues.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Hugh Henry: No, I am over time as it is, and I have taken three interventions.

We have to resolve those problems in order to get a satisfactory service in the community. I look forward to the publication of the Health and Community Care Committee's report. It will make a contribution to taking us forward as a Parliament, but I regret that we have not had the opportunity to have a debate on community care where that report was the central focus of the Parliament. I hope that the report will help to move the Executive in the direction that the committee has been pressing for for some time.

10:44

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): The point is that the debate on the report of the Health and Community Care Committee cannot take place for eight to 10 weeks. I know nothing about that report—I am not on the Health and Community Care Committee—but I have carried out my own inquiry, which I was compelled to do because the Scottish Executive could not tell me how many elderly people had been assessed for care in residential and nursing homes. As at 17 October the Executive had no idea. I managed to find out. Those people need something to be done now.

I read bits of the Health and Community Care Committee's reports, I attended the committee when Sir Stewart Sutherland gave evidence, and I have visited him myself. I do not think that I am not entitled to speak in the debate, when about 2,000 people have been assessed for residential homes and cannot be placed. I say to Hugh Henry that that figure is mainly due to lack of funding, although part of it can be attributed to a lack of places.

I have the answers from authorities and they are available to any member who wants to see information on their constituency. I have a whole folder of information that the Executive should have known. Page 6 of the Executive's "Response to the Royal Commission on Long Term Care" says:

"Sadly, as many as 1 in 5 . . . already in residential or nursing home care might have been looked after at home had the necessary support and services been available."

We all agree with that. We want people to stay in their homes, but the reality is that the services are not available.

Home helps are being cut and, in the Borders, the number is down by 21 per cent. Health visitors and district nurses have also been cut. A written

answer to Donald Gorrie shows that the figure for health visitors and district nurses in the Borders has remained static for the past five years. The number of wardens in sheltered homes has been cut. A headline from South Ayrshire says:

"Two wardens to take care of 612 elderly residents".

That is because of cuts that the local authority made to save £100,000. It made 19 full-time wardens into 19 part-time wardens. That is happening now.

I say to Margaret Smith that we cannot wait 10 weeks to talk about those issues. We must highlight them now, to assist the Health and Community Care Committee. The Parliament can shine a bright light on those dark corners.

Mrs Smith: I will speak to Christine Grahame straightforwardly. I would like to have had the opportunity that she has had to say exactly how she feels without constraint from a committee report or party. That is all that I ask for. I am not asking for a delay of eight or 10 weeks. A two-week delay would have given us the report and allowed all members, including those who have spent much time considering the issue, the chance to do what Christine Grahame has done. I congratulate her, and I am always delighted to hear her talk about the issue, because she cares so much about it.

Christine Grahame: I believe that there is some cross-party consensus, but I have doubts about whether the report would have been accelerated to allow it to be debated in two weeks' time.

I will return to an important issue that Ian Jenkins raised. Day care centres are under serious pressure. I have visited some in Glasgow, I have been to Broomhill day centre and I will visit some centres in East Lothian. They are at the heart of services to maintain people in the community. They provide social contact, lunch clubs, somewhere to go and somewhere to get dressed up for.

I was canvassing in Anniesland yesterday and could find nobody to canvass. Why? They were all at their local community centre. I was pleased that they were there, even though it meant that hardly anybody was in that day. That is what it should be about—keeping people stuck in their homes is not the answer. We must progress on the role of day care centres, giving them much more secure funding. Broomhill day centre's funding has remained static for the past six years, yet 30 dementia patients go there to socialise with non-dementia clients. That is essential to the community and gives carers the respite they need.

My final point concerns the £10 million that the Executive has put into delayed discharges. On 1 November, I lodged a question—S1W-10377—on

the £10 million. The answer I received was that local authorities could apply any balances that they had to other services. I have a series of questions in today's business bulletin, reflecting my concern that those balances might be artificial and that money that was meant for older people will be deployed elsewhere. I ask Malcolm Chisholm to consider my questions, which I hope are fairly specific, and give me straight answers about how those balances will be monitored.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to wind-up speeches. Sorry—point of order, Mr Jenkins?

Ian Jenkins: On a point of order. Forgive me, Presiding Officer, but it suddenly occurred to me that I should put on record the fact that I serve on the management committee of Broomhill day centre, although I was not seeking extra funds for the centre on this occasion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Jenkins. Your comment was helpful.

We now come to wind-up speeches. The Liberal Democrats will have four minutes, the Conservatives will have five minutes, the Executive will have seven minutes and the SNP will have 10 minutes.

10:50

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): There is no question but that we should have this debate. As Nicola Sturgeon said, the issues are immediate and pressing, but they are also long term and are not going to go away—certainly not in the next fortnight.

Significant action has been and will be taken, and further action will be required. Care in the community, as it should be, is the best way and the best place to care for an increasing number of people, not just the elderly. Treatment of mental illness is improving and public treatment of people with mental illness is gradually becoming more enlightened. As the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 kicks in, its provisions will make it physically possible for more people with disability to live in the community. We know that we will need more, and better, community care provision.

Care in the community merits serious and informed debate. Two significant reports will be published soon: after 10 months of work, the Health and Community Care Committee will publish its report and recommendations, and the joint futures group will publish its report. The Liberal Democrat view is that a more significant, productive and informed debate will be possible when those reports are published and that their publication should have been the impetus for this debate, rather than a somewhat childish desire to

be able to say, "This was our debate".

10:51

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): I owe SNP members an apology: I thought that they had 10 minutes for their opening speech, but in fact they had 15 minutes. However, given the fact that they used those 15 minutes to make no points at all, the intention of my intervention during Nicola Sturgeon's speech stands.

During the debate, Scottish Conservative members have tried to put across our policy, which is that we believe that the Executive should implement Sir Stewart Sutherland's central recommendation on funding personal care. That has been a consistent Scottish Conservative policy and it does no disservice to the Health and Community Care Committee's report.

We also recognise that the nationalists' motion concerns the here and now. They are concerned that Scotland's winter measures may not be robust enough and that the welcome new funding for local authorities is not reaching the right places fast enough.

I will address the latter point. A few weeks ago, the minister presented to the committee her plans for the winter pressure group. If SNP members of the Health and Community Care Committee had been present for that private briefing with the minister, they could have questioned her further on those plans. Given Christine Grahame's concerns about day centres, perhaps she should be asking why her colleagues did not attend that evening, as they could have questioned the minister robustly.

The Executive's document "Lessons from Winter 1999/2000", which was published in August, makes clear, strong recommendations on how to cope in the here and now. It is important that the Parliament is informed how many of those recommendations have been implemented so far, and I ask the deputy minister for a clear response to that point. I also ask him how much of the £10 million has reached the front line, to the Executive's knowledge, and how many beds have been affected to date. If we are to make a genuine difference, it is important that we monitor the number of beds and places, so that members are not told that the information is not held centrally.

By way of a warning, I hope that Susan Deacon's announcement on pledged commitments to Scotland's elderly does not pre-empt the committee's report. I draw her announcement to the attention of the Presiding Officer, because if it does pre-empt that report, some form of reprimand should be issued to the Executive, given that it has made a strong point of castigating the SNP today.

We would have liked to support the entire SNP motion, but the latter half is not fully accurate. We recognise that the Executive has implemented a number of measures to try to alleviate immediate problems. I am afraid that the Scottish Conservatives do not take the magic wand approach to politics often adopted by the SNP—that if there were an independent Scotland tomorrow morning, everything would be fine and beds would be unblocked in minutes. We live in the real world, while the SNP does not.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way on that point?

Ben Wallace: No, I am afraid not. I am coming to Shona Robison, so she should not worry.

It is a shame that the SNP has chosen such a divisive debate today. Its contribution has done nothing to ensure that members of the Health and Community Care Committee continue in the non-partisan way in which they have worked over the past year. We have worked hard on our report—and I do not include the two new haudit-and-daudit members who are sitting on the SNP benches. The SNP members who were on the committee at the time contributed in a strong and passionate manner and they should be proud of their contribution. I will miss Kay Ullrich, who always fought for fairness and for sensible debate, even in the face of some of her own.

As I depart from the committee, I would like to fire a warning shot across the bows of the new members. If Scotland is to get the better health service that it deserves, it must have a non-partisan, hard-working committee. Scotland does not want a committee of bullies and showboaters and it does not want the sort of behaviour that we have seen from Nicola Sturgeon and Shona Robison. The next time that they feel a strong need to persuade, I suggest that they pick on someone their own size, such as a 14-year-old. They have done a disservice to the community and to their SNP predecessors on the Health and Community Care Committee. Above all, they have done a disservice to their colleague Christine Grahame, who has been fighting since long before I was involved in the debate to improve care for everyone. The credit for many of the issues raised in the debate must always go to Christine Grahame, but the type of cheap politics that we have seen from Nicola Sturgeon and Shona Robison has done nothing at all to improve the future care of people in Scotland.

10:56

Malcolm Chisholm: I was almost overcome by nostalgia during some of this morning's speeches. For example, Margaret Jamieson reminded me of the huge white folders that I spent last Christmas reading, and Margaret Smith waxed lyrical about

the multidisciplinary team that she still leads. Perhaps the most touching moment of all came when Mary Scanlon described what must surely have been the high point of the new politics: when she, Duncan Hamilton and Margaret Jamieson went together to the Western Isles. I regret that I was not with them.

All those comments lead me to the main point that the committee members were making: it is regrettable that we could not have their collective wisdom on the subject for a debate such as this. However, the point about the timing of the debate has already been made by many members.

Shona Robison: Perhaps Malcolm Chisholm will take this opportunity to say whether the Executive will be in a position to give a full response to the inquiry report in two weeks' time or even before the Christmas recess.

Malcolm Chisholm: I am also mindful of Mary Scanlon's request for us to make a measured response. Indeed, she asked us to take time over it, and that is precisely what we shall do. Of course, having a debate two weeks from now would not have prevented committee members from using their collective wisdom.

On a slightly less new-politics note, I was pleased and slightly amused to hear Mary Scanlon castigating the SNP in Angus for failing to protect local authority home care. Strange things happen in the Scottish Parliament.

Many other members made interesting and important contributions to the debate. John Scott emphasised the importance of choice and of sheltered housing. I echo those points. Not only do we need more sheltered housing; we need more very sheltered housing. That is the way that we would like to see a lot of community care going. John Scott was right to say that choice is important. Although we want to shift the balance of care towards home care, there will be a continuing need for nursing home and residential care, and people ought to have a choice.

Christine Grahame rose—

Kay Ullrich: Does Malcolm Chisholm have any comment to make on the fact that warden services are being slashed up and down the country to the detriment of the care of our frail, elderly population?

Malcolm Chisholm: Kay Ullrich has overstated the point, but I shall certainly give attention to the matter that she mentioned as part of my new work.

I saw Christine Grahame rising to intervene a moment ago, and I shall now deal with some of the points that she made in her speech. She also emphasised the importance of home care. She supports it, Sir Stewart Sutherland supports it, and, of course, the Executive supports it, as I said

at length in my opening statement. She also referred to money and mentioned the sum of £10 million. However, as Richard Simpson reminded us, the delayed discharge money is, in fact, £19 million. Perhaps Ben Wallace should remember that point too.

Christine Grahame raised an important point about money being directed towards older people, and there is an historic issue about grant-aided expenditure not always being spent on them. Local authorities need to address that point, but Christine Grahame should also recognise the new basis on which we have allocated that new money. It is given for specific outcomes, which will be closely monitored.

Christine Grahame: Although local authorities have submitted their bids and the sums have been agreed, the answer that I was given did not make it clear what that money would be used for. I was told merely that it would go “towards other services”. Is the minister telling us now that those other services will be services relating to older people, rather than buses, rubbish collection or whatever local authorities feel they need the money for?

Malcolm Chisholm: Yes. We considered carefully the bids that were made. Some people complained about a delay, but we wanted to ensure that plans were in place and we will continue to monitor them. We will also monitor the money that has been given to health boards for winter and for delayed discharges. That addresses Ben Wallace’s point. The further we move into winter, the more closely we will monitor the use of that money.

As Ben Wallace said, the Conservative amendment talks about free personal care being “the best way forward”. I repeat that we are reviewing that issue, which is an important matter in its own right. However, free personal care would not help solve the problems that we are discussing this morning. Indeed, it could be argued that if the money that we are putting into home care and the other areas that I have mentioned were used to provide free personal care, the problems would be exacerbated. That is not to say that the funding of personal care is not an important issue; it is simply to say that it is not at the heart of this morning’s debate.

Nicola Sturgeon: It is not too long since Malcolm Chisholm was a member of the Health and Community Care Committee. Does he, as an individual, think that it is right for the Executive to pay for personal care, or does he support the current arrangements?

Malcolm Chisholm: In September, when I was still a member of the Health and Community Care Committee and a back bencher, I made a speech

on that very matter. I cannot repeat that speech in one and a half minutes, but perhaps Nicola Sturgeon could read it at 11.15.

Hugh Henry and Margaret Jamieson made the important point of principle that this is not just about money: it is about the best way forward. As Hugh Henry said, structural and organisational issues are of fundamental importance. One of the key principles that I outlined in my opening speech was that we want joint and seamless working, to ensure the maximum use of the community care pound.

Tricia Marwick made a hard-hitting speech, as is her wont, in which she said, exaggerating somewhat—as is also her wont—that we were turning our backs on some of the most vulnerable people in society. I remind her once again of what the SNP has collectively forgotten this morning: that action is being taken now. That action includes the £10 million that has been made available to health boards for the winter, the £10 million for dealing with flu, the £5 million for aids and adaptation and the £19 million for delayed discharge.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I do not think that I am allowed to give way in the last minute of my speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have two or three minutes in hand. It is your call, Mr Chisholm.

Malcolm Chisholm: I will give way to Tricia Marwick.

Tricia Marwick: Does Malcolm Chisholm accept that, despite all the money that he claims is going into services, home help services in Fife and throughout Scotland have been slashed since the Labour Government came to power?

Malcolm Chisholm: With regard to home care, there are regional variations and regional choices to be made. However, from the debate this morning the current direction of travel is clear. It is self-evident that building up home care is at the heart—

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: The member is stretching the Presiding Officer’s patience.

Extending home care is at the heart of the Executive’s priorities. The announcement of 5 October was all about that.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I really am in my last minute now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I confirm that Mr Chisholm is in his last minute.

Malcolm Chisholm: I remind members, with particular reference to the wording of the motion, that, besides the £25 million that has been allocated, £19 million is available to the NHS and local authorities now, for this winter, to deal with delayed discharges. That money will be available again in the next three financial years.

We have not yet seen the full effect of the money in action. We wanted to be sure that plans were right, so the money was released to health boards in August and to local authorities in October. It will take a little more time to bring about the improvements that we have promised, but we will track the outcomes and ensure that the money is used to good effect.

I do not suggest that the money will solve all the problems. Earlier, I reminded the chamber of Susan Deacon's words about this being a three-decade-old problem that we will need two or more years to deal with. However, we should remember and acknowledge the money that is being invested and the action that is being taken now, for this winter. We have made a good start. We are committed to continuing improvement and we shall press forward with urgency.

11:05

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Ben Wallace bizarrely suggested that I should be picking on 14-year-olds. I wonder whether he was volunteering to go first.

I look forward to the unveiling of the community care inquiry report. I know that the Health and Community Care Committee has been working hard on it for 10 months. Margaret Smith said that she had given 10 months of her life to that inquiry. I have given 10 years of my life to working in the community care sector, which I care about passionately.

The community care inquiry will be far-reaching and will make many important recommendations on the way in which community care should be delivered. It is widely known that the SNP has pursued the issue of current waiting lists for nursing homes and residential homes for some weeks, as Christine Grahame outlined. I questioned the health minister on two occasions about the matter and failed to get an adequate response. The SNP brought the motion to Parliament this morning to try to get answers to our questions, but unfortunately we have yet again not been given any.

It is plain to any rational person that the debate is about the here and now. Malcolm Chisholm let the cat out of the bag when, in response to my intervention, he failed to confirm that there would be a substantive response to the committee's report from the Executive before the Christmas

recess. He is clearly saying, "Watch this space." It will be January at the earliest. That is not good enough for the 2,000 people who are now on waiting lists. They require care to prevent them from being in a vulnerable situation.

Malcolm Chisholm: In responding to Shona Robison's intervention, I referred to another member of the Health and Community Care Committee—who if I may say so has been on it for a longer time than Shona Robison—who asked for a measured response. I do not know whether Shona Robison is aware of the procedures of the Parliament in relation to responding to reports. We are doing many things in the interim, but the correct response to a report is to take time to respond properly.

Shona Robison: That flies in the face of Margaret Smith's contention that the SNP was wrong to bring the debate to the chamber because there will be a similar one in two weeks' time. Who is right and who is wrong? I am confused on that point, if Malcolm Chisholm does not mind my saying so.

The debate is about what happens over the next few weeks as we head into winter. It is disappointing that certain members of Parliament have chosen to squander the opportunity by indulging in tittle-tattle instead of addressing the needs of their constituents.

People outside Parliament will not understand why members who are supposed to be interested in community care have taken their ball away and have not contributed to the debate as they should have done. That is disappointing.

Dr Simpson: Does Shona Robison accept the point that members are making, that the joint futures group report and the Health and Community Care Committee report would have allowed the debate to be much better informed? Passionate advocates from the Health and Community Care Committee would have supported some of the excellent and passionate points that we all want to make.

Shona Robison: I look forward to those passionate points when they are made—probably in January. We are talking about the here and now—the 2,000 people who cannot wait for us to deliberate in January because they need support now.

The SNP began the inquiry because the Executive did not have the information that it should have had. Mr Chisholm should consider why the Executive did not have the information about waiting lists. We have done the work for Malcolm Chisholm. We have built up a picture of the here and now; of the immediate issues that must be addressed before it is the middle of winter. As my colleagues have outlined, the

picture is worrying. Waiting lists are long for both hospitals and those at home.

The returns that we received show that almost 900 people are vulnerable and inappropriately placed. At least 2,000 people in Scotland are awaiting a place in a nursing or residential home. Let us be clear: the £10 million that was announced by the Executive for that purpose—albeit welcome—is inadequate to meet those needs. If members do not believe me, they should read the letters from the many local authorities which say that £10 million will not be enough to meet those needs. At least 75 per cent of the people who are on those waiting lists will remain on them—the evidence is there for all to see.

Mary Scanlon: Given the member's concern for those 2,000 people, does she support the SNP-led council in Angus, which is abandoning local authority responsibility for home care and making it possible that 900 people will not receive any care? Is that the SNP policy in action?

Shona Robison: I have never before heard of a council being criticised for listening to people and doing the right thing—keeping home care in the local authority. It is strange that a council is being criticised for doing the right thing—only the Tories could make such a criticism.

Let us return to the crux of the matter. Scottish Care, the organisation that represents 60 per cent of private and residential care homes in Scotland, claims that it will be impossible to move the elderly out of beds that they do not need because councils cannot afford the places. Nicola Sturgeon's quote from Anthony Toft showed that people in the health profession are less than convinced that the procedures that are being put in place will protect elderly people this winter.

Members have cited examples from local authorities throughout Scotland. Perhaps Margaret Jamieson should turn her attention to the 62 people in East Ayrshire who have been assessed as needing nursing home or residential care, but for whom no funding is available. If she wants to see the letter that I received from East Ayrshire Council, I shall give it to her after the debate. That is where the problems lie, and it is unfortunate that members have not turned their attention to those important issues this morning. In the constituency of the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, 34 people are in the same position through a lack of funding. I would be happy to give him the letter from the City of Edinburgh Council which identifies that fact.

People are being forced to resort to the courts to receive the care that they have been assessed as requiring. Mr Arthur MacGregor, who is 90 years old, was assessed as requiring full-time care, yet South Lanarkshire Council told him that he was

16th on a waiting list of 199 people and so it could not provide him with funding for seven months. We want to know about the plight of Mr MacGregor. We want to know what the minister is going to do for Mr MacGregor. The debate is about the here and now.

The situation appears to be even more serious when one considers that the needs of those who require a nursing home or residential care place will be intensive while they remain at home. The present home care service is insufficient to meet those people's needs. Local authority after local authority has confirmed that services are not in place to meet the needs of people who require intensive home care. We have lost 30,000 home care hours since Labour came to power—a point that Malcolm Chisholm did not try to deny. That means that authorities are even less likely to be able to provide intensive home care support. People will be left in vulnerable situations over the winter months, and that is not good enough.

Although we welcome the additional resources that were announced by the Minister for Health and Community Care last month, they will not come on stream, in the main, until April 2001. We want to know about the here and now: we want to know what the minister will do between now and April. We have had no answer to that question this morning.

There is nothing to dispute in the Conservative amendment: we agree with the full implementation of the Sutherland recommendations and have been calling for it for much longer than the Tories have. Yet again, the minister has chosen not to give the Parliament an answer on when the recommendations of the Sutherland report will be implemented in full. Nevertheless, I am at a loss to explain why the Tories feel it necessary to remove the crux of the matter—the fact that, although we need action now, resources will not be available until 2001. Only the Tories can explain that.

Let me be clear: it is the SNP's duty to be an effective Opposition and to bring these very real concerns to the chamber. We will not shirk from that responsibility, even though others might. We want to discuss the real issues that affect the people of Scotland here and now, not the mince that we have heard in other debates. After today, it will be clear to all that some members in the chamber are not so keen to debate those issues and indeed prefer to hide behind smokescreens to avoid doing so.

Mrs Smith: Will the member give way?

Shona Robison: No, I am just winding up.

The Health and Community Care Committee's report on its inquiry will be published at the end of the month, after which the Executive has eight weeks to respond. That takes us beyond the

Christmas recess and the key pressure points of the winter weeks. Today's debate presented an opportunity to question the Executive about people trapped in inappropriate care over those weeks. By taking the stance that they have, members of the Health and Community Care Committee have achieved nothing more than letting the Scottish Executive off the hook.

I urge members to support Nicola Sturgeon's motion.

Housing Stock Transfer

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is the SNP debate on motion S1M-1355, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on housing stock transfer, and two amendments to the motion.

11:17

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Scotland's housing is in crisis. There has been a collapse in investment, with housing investment at a fraction of what it was; and Government housing legislation has yet to surface. Quite simply, Labour is not delivering on housing for tenants. In 1979, borrowing consents in real terms amounted to £629 million; however, in 2000-01, that figure has dropped to £180 million. Glasgow had 350 per cent more to invest in council housing in 1987 than in 2000. In 1987, the city had £178 million to invest; in 1995-96, it had £100 million; and in 1999-2000 the figure dropped dramatically to £52 million.

Although we can criticise the Government for its record on investment, we also recognise that it has moved on certain issues and support its policy of dealing with council debt. Indeed, the SNP first introduced the policy of lifting the debt burden of councils that had been placed on them by Government policy and allowing them to invest tenant rents in tenants' homes. At the time, we were accused by new Labour of fantasy economics; however, it is now happy to embrace the policy.

Members will recall September's debate on the extensive Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee report on housing stock transfer—a debate that, for Labour, had been conveniently organised on the Thursday of the SNP conference. The report also included my detailed and comprehensive minority commentary which covered the whole of Scotland, not just Glasgow.

We are bringing this debate to the chamber today because there have been three major developments in the city of Glasgow and the Government that demand that we do our job and come back and scrutinise what Government policy is—or rather is not—doing in that city. Those developments are the change in ministerial control of housing policy; the election of the new First Minister, who wants to dump a bad policy; and the delay in the Glasgow ballot.

We must remember that what happens in Glasgow is of serious concern to the whole of Scotland. Councillors, officials and tenants are waiting to find out what will happen in Glasgow as

the result will determine and influence when ballots are held in the other seven transfer areas and the future of other councils that are being forced to consider the policy. Indeed, across the UK from Birmingham to Cardiff, people are watching the situation in Glasgow.

Anyone tramping the streets of the Glasgow Anniesland constituency for the by-election knows that housing stock transfer is a major issue on the doorsteps. From Drumchapel housing in desperate need of repair and renovation—or what will be left of it after demolition—to Knightswood where people live in the city's better-quality stock, tenants are wondering what exactly they will get out of the deal. The issue for them is rents and whether they will be affordable in 10 years.

I want to expand on the three developments in recent months. First, the ministers who, in their various roles in the chamber and before they were elected to the Parliament, were in charge of housing policy are no longer in charge of it. Frank McAveety had had a significant role as former leader of Glasgow City Council, as had Wendy Alexander in her previous role as adviser to the housing minister, Calum MacDonald—or perhaps it was Malcolm Chisholm; I am not sure—who kicked the process off. The removal of the two ministers from office begs the question: will the new ministerial team take the opportunity to revise the policy? I suggest that it should.

Secondly, a new First Minister has been elected with a demand that the Government dump its unpopular and bad policies. Our motion demands that wholesale stock transfer be dumped. The new team knows the difficulties that it faces in convincing tenants on that issue, despite the expensive, one-sided propaganda that has been issued at taxpayers' expense. As the Executive runs into the electoral sand on the timing of the ballot in relation to electoral contests at Westminster, councils and Holyrood, the pressure must be on to revise radically or abandon the policy while the going is good. Indeed, this week's edition of *The Glaswegian* contains an interesting article by a certain back bencher—not of this chamber, I might add—on that very subject.

Talking of press coverage, I must ask what was meant by stories of the appointment—or non-election, rather—of Cathy Jamieson, who is an impressive woman, as deputy leader of new Labour in Scotland. There was speculation in the *Sunday Herald* that her appointment would bring concessions on stock transfer. If a rethink is afoot, we demand to know about it—concessions by whom, for whom? There is another serious question: will the policy shift from the community ownership-empowerment model pushed by Wendy Alexander and Frank McAveety, or will there be a shift back to the Glasgow-wide model

that the council originally pushed? Has the council won? Will stock owned by Glasgow City Council, failed landlord that it is, be moved in one block without onward transfer to small, local organisations?

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): Fiona Hyslop goes on about community ownership. I often hear her quote the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, saying how important it is to take on board the views of that well-recognised housing organisation.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member get to the point?

Cathie Craigie: I am trying to do so. I presume that Fiona Hyslop received the briefing from the Chartered Institute of Housing, which pointed out how important it is to give tenants facts about what is happening in the stock transfer debate. When will she do that?

Fiona Hyslop: It is important that tenants are aware of the—

Cathie Craigie: Facts?

Fiona Hyslop: It is important that they are aware of the political changes and developments. Those are political facts. Changes and developments have happened. We have a First Minister who is reviewing Government policy. I believe that the tenants deserve to know that there is now an opportunity for change in Government housing policy. One serious concern for many tenants in Glasgow is whether regulation will be the same for the different social landlords or whether there will be a two-tier system.

The third development, and the most important, is the discovery this week that the ballot is to be delayed. The ballot was originally due to be held in November this year, but was then put back to spring 2001. I refer members to the timetable on page 16 of Scottish Parliament information centre research paper 99/13 on housing stock transfers. The ballot may now not take place until November 2001. That means that significant levels of investment in Glasgow's stock would not take place until summer 2002. A whole term of office for new Labour at Westminster would come and go with nothing done to improve the state of people's homes.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I want to move on.

New Labour is not delivering. Time has been wasted on an ill-thought-out policy, with Glasgow tenants paying the price. Almost £170 million in capital investment has been lost in the past four years of Labour in Glasgow, which has led to a massive deterioration in Glasgow's housing stock. Glasgow City Council's borrowing consent was

£90 million in 1989; it is now reduced to £24 million.

We are told that the delay is because Glasgow tenants want more time for consultation and to get the facts, which is perhaps the point that Cathie Craigie made, but that is because years went by in the early part of new Labour's Administrations at Westminster and Edinburgh when the tenants were frozen out of the process and staff and unions were kept out in the cold. There was general criticism of that across the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee. Do not blame the tenants for the delay.

The delay has other significant ramifications. I have been pursuing the Government's central heating proposals, which are to be welcomed, but I have concerns about what the delay will mean for the people and pensioners of Glasgow. I have written to Bob Allan and Charlie Gordon, who told me that they are concerned about the timing of the proposals. I am not saying that the Glasgow pensioners would be excluded from proposals relating to central heating. I am concerned about whether the investment will come by winter 2001 or be delayed because the finance is tied up in stock transfer.

That is why, more than a month ago, I lodged a series of questions asking whether each of the seven transferring authorities would get finance from the £350 million announcement and, if so, when they would get it. I believe that the reason why there is a gap between the £120 million that was earmarked in the budget for central heating and the £350 million trumpeted by the Executive is that the central heating proposal for the seven authorities is tied up in stock transfer. Will Glasgow pensioners get the same pro rata access to the fund as every other pensioner in Scotland from April 2001 in time for next winter?

Where is the money coming from and how can it be accounted for? Council housing throughout Scotland and particularly in Glasgow is in appalling disrepair. Children are being brought up in cold, damp housing that is having a damaging effect on their health and on their opportunities in life.

The status quo is not an option—no one is arguing that it is. The SNP wants to see a series of steps being taken. There are many ways in which to invest in public housing: public investment from the people's war chest; the release of capital receipts; borrowing from the Public Loans Board, which we can afford to do; using local housing companies; enabling small-scale transfers to existing co-operatives—

The Minister for Social Justice (Jackie Baillie) *rose—*

Fiona Hyslop: I am winding up.

Public service trusts could be used to allow all landlords to access private finance pooled with stock managed by whatever landlord tenants want, including the council, but with democratic reassurances. The debt—or debt servicing—could be transferred without the need to transfer the stock. In Glasgow, that would involve £1.2 billion over 10 years. Equity release schemes could be developed and the debt could be privatised rather than the housing sold off.

The tenants of Glasgow are left waiting for new Labour to deliver. The SNP will keep bringing the issue back to the chamber. We will keep on the tail of the Executive, demanding detail and scrutinising its proposals. We have heard much of progressive pragmatism from the First Minister, but what ministers will hear from the SNP on this issue is progressive scepticism. The people of Glasgow and Scotland deserve no less.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the ballot for the proposed Glasgow housing stock transfer may now be delayed until late 2001; calls upon the Scottish Executive to abandon its wholesale stock transfer policy in its current review of problem policies and further calls upon the Executive to release budgets allocated for stock transfer now in order to improve housing stock in Glasgow and throughout Scotland.

11:27

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): Yet again, I find myself debating housing stock transfer with Bill Aitken and Fiona Hyslop. I seem to have been doing that since I arrived in the Scottish Parliament.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to put the case for community ownership on behalf of the Executive and to respond to the SNP motion. I categorically assure the Parliament and everyone who is listening to the debate that the policy is not under review and that we are completely and utterly committed to community ownership.

I am grateful for my time as convener of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee. We conducted a marathon inquiry that ensured a great degree of scrutiny of the Executive's proposals and is a tribute to the parliamentary process. It allowed us to assess the varying perspectives and consider the evidence behind the arguments. Working with tenants in Glasgow 20 years ago, I was committed to helping them tackle need and create the means by which to decide policy. I continue to be committed to that.

I was struck by the terms of the SNP's motion, which illustrates fundamental contradictions in its approach. Before dealing with those, I want to talk

about the policy of housing stock transfer across Scotland. The Executive has made it clear that Glasgow is only part of the picture. We must address needs and requirements throughout Scotland. The Executive has developed a spectrum of approaches to meet those needs as determined by local authorities. In some cases, it might not be necessary to change current arrangements.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): Wendy Alexander and Frank McAveety are listed as members of the steering group whose job it is to oversee the creation of the new community ownership scheme for Glasgow council housing. Are they still on that steering group?

Ms Curran: I am delighted to be working with my colleagues in Glasgow City Council and I have good relationships there. This is a tenant-led proposal. The Glasgow housing association will take forward the proposal in Glasgow. There are also partial transfers and regeneration partnerships across Scotland.

Mr Quinan: The minister has not answered the question.

Ms Curran: I will not be shouted down again by Lloyd Quinan. I think that I have made my position very clear with him. He will not shout me down. I will keep saying it: he should learn some manners.

Partial transfers and regeneration partnerships are appropriate to deal with the pockets of worst housing.

Mr Quinan: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it acceptable for the Deputy Minister for Social Justice to suggest that I am being ill mannered in simply asking a question?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): As I said earlier, it is not parliamentary practice for members to stay on their feet when it has been indicated that their intervention is not being taken. I do not know whether that is what is the minister referred to. I will read her comments later and get back to Mr Quinan.

Ms Curran: I am fascinated that that is the substance of the SNP criticism of my approach.

Partial transfers are appropriate in certain cases, such as Ardler in Dundee and Craigmillar in Edinburgh.

I am a Glaswegian and I love my city dearly, but I take seriously my responsibility to Scotland in my new role. I am delighted to announce that my first ministerial visit in connection with this policy will be to the Borders, where I look forward to meeting Euan Robson. However, we do not apologise for recognising the scale of need in Glasgow, although we have been criticised in some quarters for doing so. It is important, particularly given the

crippling debt, that we direct Scotland's resources to that need.

Our resources will be delivered within a framework of sound finance and effective management—that is what is missing from the SNP approach. Tackling the debt, maximising investment opportunities, enhanced regulation and community ownership represent sound results for the public purse.

I will discuss the text of the motion. I have argued many times, with undoubted support from the SNP, that we must have tenant involvement and consultation. I strongly welcome the approach of the Glasgow housing association, which is to have a tenant in the chair—we all know that Rankine Kennedy clearly asserts tenant authority. If we accept a tenant-led model, we must accept the pace that tenants determine. That is the first of many contradictions within SNP policy. The SNP argues that tenants must be involved, but when tenants' influence is shown, the SNP wants to abandon the policy.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Can the minister provide any example from any of the authorities in Scotland that are considering transfer of the initiative coming directly from the tenants?

Ms Curran: I referred earlier to my many years of activity with tenants groups throughout Glasgow. Twenty years ago, I worked in the east end of Glasgow, where tenants set up tenant management co-operatives. Brian Adam should look at the history of housing associations.

I do not deny that there is urgency in the housing situation. I want to move at as fast a pace as possible. However, it is better to take a few months now to consider the baseline and work out the process than to wait decades for the alternative.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): On the question of urgency, the minister mentioned the working relationship that she has with her colleagues on Glasgow City Council. Does she accept Glasgow City Council's submission to the Executive paper, "Better Homes for Better Communities", in which the council tells us that there has been a £230 million cut in real terms in investment in council housing in Glasgow since Labour was elected?

Ms Curran: By 2003-04 we will have increased public investment in housing by 36 per cent in real terms above that in the plans that we inherited in 1997-98.

I want to discuss some of the points that Tommy Sheridan and other members have made previously. Some people have argued that we should lift the debt and leave the council to deal

with housing. Not only would that deny the opportunity for community ownership; it would delay considerably the programme of investment. It is curious for the SNP to say that we should write off the debt and walk away given that the SNP candidate in Anniesland says that Glasgow City Council is the most dreadful council there is.

Fiona Hyslop: It is.

Ms Curran: But the SNP wants to give it all that money.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Ms Curran: I am sorry—I am beginning to run out of time.

In previous debates, Mr Sheridan's figures have been wrong. He used the figure of £125 million, but the correct figure is £93 million. If the route that he supports were taken, it would take more than 15 years to match the spend under the transfer option and nothing would be done for community ownership.

The Scottish Executive will increase its housing budget by 20 per cent in the next three years. Given the scale of the problem that we face, with 600,000 homes in Scotland with dampness, condensation or mould, even that increase is not enough. We need to find alternative resources and to bring more finance into council housing.

The transfers to community ownership will deliver up to £3 billion of new investment, a major improvement in the quality and energy efficiency of the housing stock as a result of that investment, and substantial public health benefits as better housing leads to better health. It will deliver the local, responsive decision making that tenants have always argued for, with tenants and others in the community leading the decision-making process. It will deliver accountability to tenants and the wider community through properly regulated not-for-profit voluntary organisations. It will stimulate local economies by getting jobs into our deprived local communities.

That is the way forward for Scottish housing—getting investment, putting communities in the driving seat. I am delighted to say that community ownership is not part of our policy review and we will be taking it forward.

I move amendment S1M-1355.3, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“supports the community ownership policies that the Scottish Executive is taking forward to attract significant new investment into housing and supports putting tenants at the heart of the decision making process relating to their homes, in line with its commitments in *Partnership for Scotland* and *Programme for Government*.”

11:36

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): The more frequently we revisit the issue of housing stock transfer, the more compelling it seems to the Conservative party that we transfer Glasgow's housing stock. Fiona Hyslop made one basic, correct point: the status quo is not an option. How can it be when so many Glasgow tenants are living in conditions that are deplorable by any standard? Something has to be done, and we must do it by empowering people to do things for themselves. Massive investment is obviously needed; the Deputy Minister for Social Justice quantified it and few disagreed with her figure. The time scale is worrying, however, particularly because there has been so much slippage. The boost to the local economy will be tremendous. Many jobs and apprenticeships for young people from disadvantaged areas will be provided. It could be a major success story.

We are not seeking to end council housing; we seek to end the culture that for so long has pervaded the thinking behind council housing. Social housing will always be needed in Scotland. We accept that and indeed might argue that the Executive's figures on the need for social housing are on the conservative side—an unusual argument for us to make, perhaps. Surely it is incumbent on all of us to ensure that the quality and standard of social housing is of an acceptable nature, providing the type of house that we ourselves would like to live in.

If we go down that road, we will be following what other countries have done, such as the former Soviet Union and the United States of America, which have realised that that culture must be done away with. With reference to America, it gives me particular pleasure to welcome Tanya Harding from the United States, who is in the public gallery to see her father, Keith Harding, in action. I know that she will be impressed.

The argument against housing stock transfer is that we are talking about privatisation of social housing. We are not doing that. In no way can it be perceived as privatisation.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Many of us believe that it is privatisation. Can Bill Aitken explain why 15 out of 29 neighbourhood forums in Glasgow have already said no to the proposal? Can it be because the people of Glasgow are no fools and see through the proposal?

Bill Aitken: We do not know what people think of the proposal and we will not know until they are properly balloted. It is essential to get on with the ballot as quickly as possible. How can it be privatisation when the control of the housing will be with the people themselves? It cannot possibly

be privatisation in those circumstances.

The SNP position has changed to some extent over recent months. What was being put forward when the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee looked into the matter was a relaxation of Treasury rules. However, that did not break up the unsympathetic and unresponsive culture in council housing.

Brian Adam: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: No—I must get on.

We want to give power to the people. The greatest success story in social housing in Scotland has been the housing association movement. People respond positively when they are given ownership of, and responsibility for, a problem. I could cite many examples of that, in Glasgow and elsewhere.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

We part from the Executive in this way: we believe that the one-off stock transfer will not work. The Executive is, in effect, imposing upon the people of Glasgow a Glasgow City Council housing department mark 2. That department has hardly been a tremendous success story, has it? We will therefore press for an early breakdown into localised housing associations. People will respond to that.

I listened carefully to the deputy minister. I am not entirely reassured. I suspect that Labour is going wobbly over the whole issue of transfer. I think that she would agree that the process has already taken a ridiculous length of time and I cannot understand why a ballot is unlikely to take place before late next year.

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): A general election is coming.

Bill Aitken: Yes, of course.

A transfer of this type is the only hope for Glasgow's social housing. The blunt truth is that the Executive is having difficulty in getting agreement from the dinosaurs that still dominate much of local government thinking in the west of Scotland. Stock transfer provides what may be the last opportunity to bring Glasgow's housing up to an acceptable standard. In time, it would lead to the end of the culture that has pervaded thinking on social housing for far too long. I condemn that culture absolutely: it has done much damage to Glasgow's community. Has Labour lost its bottle on this issue? There is a conspiracy of silence. The housing bill takes longer and longer to see the light of day.

For Labour, I understand that adopting a

Conservative policy is a major step—especially just before the next general election. Labour seems to think that tenants will have to be allowed to control their own destiny—but not just yet. Is it too much to ask the Executive to exhort Labour's backwoodsmen to accept reality and have the courage to proceed?

I move amendment S1M-1355.1, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"calls upon the Scottish Executive to recognise the rapidly worsening condition of Glasgow City Council's housing stock; agrees that improved standards of social housing can only be achieved through the genuine devolution of control of housing from councils to local housing providers with tenant involvement as initiated by the last Conservative Government and continued by the current Scottish Executive; recognises that tenant priorities will only be achieved if the size of community housing providers is limited to reflect genuine communities and maintain local control, and urges the Scottish Executive to expedite its stock transfer policy to appropriately sized community housing providers."

11:42

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I have enormous respect for the abilities of Fiona Hyslop, whose contribution to the stock transfer report in the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee was considerable. She has considerable expertise in that area. Her speech was excellent, but when boiled down, it was repetitive and unnecessary. It raised no new issues, just as the debate raises no new issues.

Fiona Hyslop talked about ministerial changes and changes to do with the ballot. However, the real change that lies behind today's debate is the imminence of the Anniesland by-election. Baldly, the SNP—and especially those behind the scenes such as Dorothy-Grace Elder who had a pot-shot at the policy earlier—wants to stir up worry, unrest, uncertainty and doubt in the minds of the electorate in Drumchapel and Knightswood in particular.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Will the member accept an intervention?

Robert Brown: No, thank you.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: On a point of order. I would like to point out that I have been in Glasgow Against Housing Stock Transfer since January 1999, which has had nothing to do with any by-election in Anniesland.

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

Robert Brown: The SNP has given us its usual spurious assertion that there is no plan B if the tenants vote no, but in essence its gripe is that the whole thing operates in a financial framework laid down by the Treasury in London. SNP members

cannot abide that at any price. Many of the so-called choices that the SNP puts forward are not within the control of this Parliament or the Executive while the Treasury rules remain as they are. I share the desire for changes to the Treasury rules—that has been the Liberal Democrats' position for a long time. However, we have to operate within the rules as they are.

Let me move on to the merits of the issue. Glasgow tenants have had to put up with deplorable housing conditions for years. Comprehensive schemes to deal with the problem have been put forward repeatedly. The direct labour organisation has undergone numerous reforms; there have been cyclical repair schemes and a major borrow-forward project, which put in quite a lot of money. Some areas have been renovated three times over, but essentially the position has not changed.

Tommy Sheridan: Can Robert Brown name an area in Glasgow that has been renovated three times?

Robert Brown: There has been considerable investment in areas such as Castlemilk, where time after time money has been spent on the same house.

Stock transfer presents three key elements. First, there is a transfer to smaller community units—bodies modelled on the highly successful housing associations, in which local people control and run their own housing. As Margaret Curran has pointed out, that is an essential part of the scheme and one that the SNP appears to be downgrading.

Brian Adam: Does the member accept that the reason for the success of the housing associations—no one would deny that they have been successful—is that they have had massive public subsidy in the form of direct grant, which has not been available to council housing departments for many years?

Robert Brown: They have also had effective and small-scale management, which is something about which we have not heard too much from the SNP this morning. We are talking about a new form of social housing. With respect to Dorothy-Grace Elder, that is not privatisation. We are discussing a new form of social housing that is characterised by success and effectiveness, rather than bureaucracy and failure.

Secondly, stock transfer releases the debt burden and utilises the security of the rental stream. Thirdly, it involves a business plan agreed by the tenants, which incorporates rent guarantees and satisfactory issues to do with forward investment.

I am well aware that there are difficulties and

challenges. No proposals to sort out the major problems in Glasgow could be without them. There are issues about the availability of labour, employment security and—as Bill Aitken said—the speed of moving to second-stage transfers. We need to concentrate on those issues and to move forward. We must direct the attention, support and talents of the Scottish Parliament towards dealing with those problems and finding solutions.

I urge members to have no truck with the SNP's approach to the debate. The SNP proposes to stop the whole process and to start again. If the motion is to be read literally, the SNP intends to take the new housing partnership moneys away from Glasgow to be used elsewhere in Scotland. The SNP wants to work up another scheme: either one that does not meet Treasury guidelines and was rejected or one that hands over millions of pounds of taxpayers' money to the Labour-led council in Glasgow, which the SNP has characterised as a terrible council. Why does the SNP want to hand money to a terrible council? That approach is rather paradoxical.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: I am sorry, but I am about to finish.

The SNP would condemn thousands of Glasgow tenants to damp and intolerable housing indefinitely. Its proposals would condemn deprived communities across Glasgow to further decline. The SNP would be saying to the 3,000 people—mainly from deprived areas—who would get jobs as a result of stock transfer that those jobs would not be available after all. It is time for the SNP to join the real world—no more fancy schemes or independence myths. Stock transfer is the way forward for Glasgow. I ask Fiona Hyslop to lend her considerable talents to help make stock transfer work and to meet the challenges that we face. It is time for the SNP to speak up for Glasgow and for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open part of the debate.

Several members want to speak in what will be a short debate. I ask members to keep their speeches as short as possible. If members respect a time limit of three minutes to three-and-a-half minutes, I will be able to accommodate everyone. However, if speeches run to four minutes or more, my ability to accommodate members will be very constrained.

11:49

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): I will try to respect that limit.

Wholesale stock transfer first reared its ugly

head back in 1998. I recall debating stock transfer with Frank McAveety and others on 22 September of that year at a meeting of Glasgow City Council's housing committee. The years pass but the quagmire deepens.

In the October issue of "Glasgow City Housing Tenant News"—an expensive council propaganda sheet aimed at convincing sceptical tenants of the merits of wholesale stock transfer—Glasgow City Council leader Charlie Gordon said that the council would agree to transfer if

"Write-off of the city's £1bn housing debt and completion of all the major work within six years is achieved."

Is that on the agenda?

At a seminar on the housing stock transfer at Hampden on 12 April, the then Minister for Communities informed those in attendance that the debt would remain with Glasgow but that

"£50 million would be contributed by the Scottish Executive towards servicing that debt".

We were also told that the refurbishment of stock would take 10 years, not six. Has the Executive's position changed? If not, how will the demands of Charlie Gordon and company be satisfied?

In November last year, in response to written question S1W-2601, Wendy Alexander stated that the Glasgow ballot would be in November 2000. Unless time is suddenly to stand still, the ballot will not now take place for six months, or a year, or ever. Meanwhile, time is standing still for the tenants whose homes have been starved of investment since new Labour came to power and who have no prospect of house modernisation or refurbishment while the stock transfer shambles rumbles on and on.

Even if the difficulties that are currently facing the Glasgow housing association are resolved and a ballot is held with the tenants overwhelmingly voting for transfer, when will the first house be modernised and the first home refurbished? Will it be four or five years after the idea was first mooted? How much will have been lost in public sector investment in Glasgow during that time and how much will have been spent on consultancy fees?

Charlie Gordon said:

"We . . . are on the verge of beginning the most ambitious council house modernisation partnership ever launched."

On the verge? And the band played, "Believe it if you like." The pyramids were built more quickly. Only last Friday, at a meeting of the south-west area housing partnership, community representatives were told that the GHA still had not set criteria for the establishment of local housing organisations, which will be expected to assume immediate responsibility for managing the

housing repair and maintenance service post transfer. Confusion reigns.

One of the arguments that we hear for the transfer is that it will create 3,000 much-needed jobs. Given that over the past four years, according to the First Minister in his previous incarnation, only 543 apprentices were trained in Glasgow in construction-related trades across private and public sectors, I thought that that would be a tall order. That was until I received a letter from the Scottish House Builders Association, indicating that the Glasgow and Clyde valley joint structure plan 2000, if approved, will lead to 3,000 job losses in the private house-building sector. Under this Executive, we are to see not only a transfer of stock, but a transfer of jobs.

Finally, what would the SNP—Scotland's party, the party of the Scottish people, independence and national renewal—do? We would abandon the policy of wholesale stock transfer. However, if the Executive presses on, Glasgow City Council's housing debt should be transferred to central Government now; the debt should not be linked exclusively to the tenure of the stock as a lever on the tenants to persuade them which way to vote in a future ballot, should one ever come to pass. Funding for public sector housing should not be dependent on wholesale stock transfer. Resources that are tied into lubricating the wheels of the stock transfer should be allocated now to public sector housing in the city.

The Executive should pull its finger out and secure a relaxation of the public sector borrowing requirement, so that the Government is in line with other European nations in terms of how public investment is secured. We are told that

"This is the only game in town",

but that is an insult to the tenants of Glasgow who continue to live by the thousand in substandard housing. The Executive, which boasts daily of additional resources, should direct some of those resources to Glasgow, a city that it has starved of investment. I urge members to support the motion.

11:53

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): I am delighted that the SNP has chosen this subject for debate today, because it gives us the opportunity to extract SNP policy. Fiona Hyslop spent nine and a half minutes criticising the Scottish Executive's policy, and one and a half minutes introducing the SNP's policy. Perhaps in her colleague's closing remarks we will hear more about what the SNP proposes for the future of tenants in Glasgow in respect of the GHA model.

I will deal with the scaremongering that is going round Glasgow at the moment, particularly about

privatisation, which Dorothy-Grace Elder mentioned earlier. My interpretation of privatisation is that it is what happened to British Telecom, Scottish Gas, Scottish Power and BP in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Tories introduced fat cats to the boardroom.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: I saw some of the fat cats—the financiers—who appeared before the housing committee in Glasgow in February. One or two of the remarks were about the dowries that they wanted—in other words, land. They showed that they were nervous about the deal, as they admitted that they had never handled 89,000 houses before.

Paul Martin: I take exception to that on behalf of housing associations. I have been a member of management committees of housing associations and I take offence at Dorothy-Grace Elder comparing housing associations to privatised bodies with fat cats sitting in their boardrooms.

Dorothy-Grace Elder *rose—*

Paul Martin: I am sorry, Dorothy. Give me a chance to speak.

I take offence in the name of people such as John Butterly, who has given 25 years to Reidvale Housing Association, and the unpaid local heroes throughout Scotland who have given their time and made things happen in their local communities. I say to Brian Adam that that work happened not just because of subsidies, but because of the commitment of those people to their local communities.

Fiona Hyslop *rose—*

Paul Martin: I will bring Fiona Hyslop in later. She must give me some time.

At every tenants association meeting that we attend, we see a wish list. The Armadale Tenants and Residents Association wants new central heating systems. The residents of Red Road, Sighthill, Charles Street and Balgrayhill multistorey flats all want double-glazed windows, fabric improvements and environmental improvements. People in the Ruchazie, Haghill and Carntyne areas all want environmental and fabric improvements. I am talking about groups in my constituency, but such requests are repeated throughout Glasgow. People want us to deliver those improvements with a package of investment throughout communities.

Tommy Sheridan: As a fellow Glasgow member, and given the problems that he has just outlined, does Paul Martin join me in condemning the Government for the real-terms cut of £230 million in council investment since it was elected?

Paul Martin: I want to move forward on behalf of my constituents. I want to talk about not what

has happened in the past two or three years, but what will happen in the next few years. I am proud of Labour's record, but I have a vision for the future of Glasgow housing association's tenants. We must move forward.

Fiona Hyslop *rose—*

Paul Martin: I would like to bring Fiona in, but I must carry on, because I am struggling for time.

We should have an informed debate. Tenants need support to formulate their plans. We do not want any more isolated housing investment programmes. We want to improve local schools, shopping facilities, nurseries and local amenities.

I will finish with the words that I heard from Rankine Kennedy, who attended a meeting with me and my colleague Councillor Allan Stewart. He said simply that he wanted his children, his grandchildren, their children, his neighbours and all tenants in Glasgow to live with a decent roof over their heads and to feel safe. He wondered whether that was too much to ask in the 21st century.

11:58

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): In May 1977, I was privileged to be elected leader of a minority Tory administration in Glasgow. In the first two weeks, we requested a meeting with the then Leader of the Opposition, Margaret Thatcher, to discuss the city's debt and housing problems.

At the Scottish Conservatives' conference in Perth that year, I was accompanied by my deputy leader, Derek Mason—who was to make a considerable impact on Scottish housing in the years that followed—and the city's treasurer, Maurice Toshner. For 40 minutes, Mrs Thatcher listened to our representations, at the end saying that when she became Prime Minister she would review the situation. Alas, there was no joy when she became Prime Minister. Prior to that, there had been representations to the Callaghan Government on the same themes—no joy. Representations were made to the Heath Government—no joy. What is on offer today is the first gleam of light in this situation.

We should bear in mind the fact that Glasgow now has its lowest population since 1891; the population is still declining. By 2005, Edinburgh's population will surpass that of Glasgow. Glasgow's housing is among the worst in Europe. The city is saddled with a £1 billion debt, accrued for buildings demolished before they were paid for. The council has agreed to ballot its tenants on a proposal to transfer the debt to the Glasgow housing association, which in turn would register with Scottish Homes. If tenants vote yes, the GHA will seek private investment to cover the £1.6

billion of work required to stop the stock disintegrating and to prevent more of the city's population from leaving the city. The Scottish Executive would service the debt to the tune of £50 million per annum. The GHA would work on the principles of a community-controlled housing association by involving tenants directly in managing the stock. Neighbourhood offices would be located strategically.

Today, only 26 per cent of Scots live in council housing, compared with 54 per cent around 30 years ago. Some people argue that servicing the debt should not be a condition of transfer. They tell us that, with the rental released by removing the debt burden, plus capital receipts from council house sales, the council could restore its own stock, saving £200 million in VAT. However, Treasury rules do not allow for that approach. For years, people have lobbied for changes to the Treasury rules, but they have always been refused.

I do not exaggerate when I say that, if the vote is no, areas of Glasgow will eventually descend into satellite shanty towns. Political dogma and outdated concepts must not be allowed to stand in the way. It is no exaggeration to say that, in some ways, the vote is more important and more crucial than votes that are cast in political elections.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

John Young: Sorry—I am on my last minute.

Fiona Hyslop touched on the point that the outcome of the vote will not only decide the future of Glasgow but have a considerable impact on west central Scotland and on Scotland as a whole.

Presiding Officer, I do not know whether I am about to break the rules—if so, so be it; you can throw me out if you like. I show the red card to all those who oppose the housing stock transfer proposal.

12:01

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I rise to my feet with some trepidation, given that the Liberal Democrats' new enforcer has just appeared in the chamber to keep an eye on me and to ensure that I am on message.

It is a pity that a lot of people who do good work—namely, the housing associations—feel pretty raw about the hints that are being given that it might be dreadful if Glasgow were to go down the stock transfer route. I make a recommendation: as the ballot in Glasgow approaches, we should invite people down from north of Scotland housing associations, such as Pentland Housing Association, Cairn Housing Association and Albyn Housing Association, so

that they could tell others how good their experiences have been. Let us have a ceilidh—we would soon have people voting for stock transfer after that.

Brian Adam: Will the member give way?

Mr Stone: No problem. I will give way in a moment.

As Robert Brown said, housing stock transfer will release money. I was a councillor for long enough to see that, as the years went by, councils were trapped in an old, unimaginative way of doing things.

I warned the minister that I would flag up the issue of the flight of people from city and town centres. There is an empty flat or two above almost any shop that one might look at. An imaginative approach would be to get people back into town centres. That could work well for old people, who would have access to shops and could also help to keep an eye on vandalism. It is completely impossible to take that sort of imaginative approach under the present regime. However, by unlocking the capital resources, we could forge ahead.

Fiona Hyslop: I agree with Jamie Stone's comments about regeneration. If he were to examine the record of housing associations and co-operatives in Glasgow, he would see that they have been very much part of the regeneration of the city. The problem is that those are not the associations and co-operatives that we talk about when we discuss wholesale stock transfer. The existing housing associations and co-operatives that undertook the regeneration work in Glasgow are being excluded from the wholesale stock transfer proposal.

Mr Stone: I thank Fiona Hyslop for her generous comments about housing associations and co-operatives, but I apply a liberal amount of salt to them.

Robert Brown was right to point out that the situation is driven by the Treasury and the Public Works Loan Board. We cannot alter that. I realise that I am playing straight into the hands of SNP members, who will say, "Well, of course, that's why we want independence and separation". I conclude by telling them, "That's why you are going to fail ignominiously in both Anniesland by-elections, where you will see two historic Liberal Democrat victories".

12:03

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Today, there has been a lot of talk of figures and statistics and the Deputy Minister for Social Justice has accused me of being wrong. I hope that the figures that I will use during my speech will be challenged

if members think that they are incorrect or misleading.

I am glad that both the deputy minister and Paul Martin, a new Labour member, were unable to challenge the fact that, since Labour was elected, £230 million in real terms has been cut from investment in Glasgow's council housing.

I will go further. People ask me all the time, "What's your alternative? It's not enough to stand up and oppose things. What would you do? How would you lever in the essential money that's required for council housing, not just in Glasgow but throughout Scotland?" I accuse new Labour of denying 251,000 council homes central heating and new double-glazed window units over the past three years. By retaining capital receipts and denying councils the right to spend what they have raised from selling their own stock, the Executive has denied councils £640 million of investment.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Does Mr Sheridan accept that, by the end of April next year, there will no council-owned house in Fife that does not have double glazing or central heating?

Tommy Sheridan: I am unaware of the details of the Fife situation. However, I can tell Helen Eadie that Fife is being refused £8 million of extra investment this year alone because of the capital receipt clawback.

I am probably the only member in this chamber who is opposed to the sale of council houses. However, if the Executive is going to sell council houses, it should at least allow the councils to reinvest the money in their existing stock. The rejected amendment to today's motion would have released £151 million this year, right now. That would have delivered 10,000 central heating units in the city of Glasgow alone and 60,000 central heating units throughout Scotland in the next two months, with no need to wait until April next year to start delivering. That is the record that the Executive must defend.

Ms Curran: Does Tommy Sheridan seriously think that, in a Scottish Parliament with responsibility for Scottish resources, we should not pay any attention to the debt situation faced by Glasgow? Should we simply say to Glasgow City Council, "You can just have all the money with no consequences," as the SNP stance implies? What we are trying to do is one of the most innovative and radical policies that Glasgow has seen for 20 years. We are trying to resolve the city's debt situation at last and get investment into housing. Tommy Sheridan's policies would bankrupt Scotland. He would just tell councils to spend, spend, spend, without thinking of the consequences. It is time that he started to be responsible and told tenants the truth.

Tommy Sheridan: I do not know whether the

Deputy Minister for Social Justice is defending the capital receipt clawback regulation. If she is, I hope that she will make it absolutely plain to the tenants of Glasgow that she defends the sale of council houses and the use of the receipts from those sales not to invest in council housing but to pay off debts under the regulation that Michael Forsyth introduced in 1996 and reinforced in 1997, a month before the Labour Government was elected. Since then, Labour has done nothing to challenge those rules. The commitment of Margaret Curran's party to council house tenants in Scotland is a shameful charade. Her Administration has denied £641 million to Scotland, £151 million of which should have gone to the city of Glasgow.

What would be available to Glasgow? What would happen if the Executive decided to manage Glasgow's capital housing debt without strings and without conditions attached? The deputy minister questions my figures, but I have a letter from David Comely, dated 8 November, which explains that a no-strings policy would create 2,305 brand-new jobs. He goes on to say that he does not know how many jobs the GHA would create, because it does not have a proposal yet. He also lists the possible investment. For example, if the servicing is freed up, £92.2 million of new money becomes available.

However, what Margaret Curran forgets and will have to learn now that she is a deputy minister—I do not mean to be patronising by telling her what she should know—is that the city already invests capital receipts in its capital programme. That is where the £124 million becomes available. If we were to return to the 1996 Tory levels of borrowing consent, we would have not £124 million a year, but £182 million a year.

There is no need for the transfer. Ministers are trying ideologically to abolish council housing rather than to deliver for the tenants of Glasgow the central heating, windows and new jobs that they want, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That brings to an end the open part of the debate. I apologise to those members who wanted to speak but whom I was unable to call. I now call Euan Robson to wind up for the Liberal Democrats.

12:09

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): I had a certain sense of déjà vu during the debate until John Young declared that there was no joy under Mrs Thatcher, which was an interesting remark.

The SNP motion asks us to abandon wholesale stock transfer, apparently because of a delayed

ballot in Glasgow, the change in ministers and the continuing misconception that somehow the required money can be made available without stock transfer, ignoring Treasury rules. As Robert Brown said, we have serious reservations about Treasury rules and want them to be changed. However, that is only half the argument. That is why I welcome the minister's commitment to continuing with the policy of community ownership.

Fiona Hyslop: The money for servicing the debt could be made available without stock transfer. It is a political decision by the Executive to tie in the servicing of Glasgow's housing debt with stock transfer. That has nothing to do with Treasury rules.

Euan Robson: I was about to say that stock transfer is not just about debt; it is about a new way of delivering housing. It means an end to municipal dominance of housing, to be replaced by tenant-led, tenant-driven housing associations.

I understand that the debate has focused on Glasgow. However, the minister alluded to the situation in the Scottish Borders, where I look forward to welcoming her when she visits. If Parliament were to agree to the SNP motion, the progress that is being made in the Borders would be curtailed. I understand that the Eildon Housing Association ballot is to take place next month. That will be the first stage in the decision about whether to amalgamate Eildon's stock and Scottish Borders Council's stock in a new Borders housing association. In my view, that would be a welcome development, because it would mean a boost in investment in housing stock from between £2 million and £4 million per annum to between £10 million and £12 million. It would also mean tenants having a greater say in the delivery of repairs to and development of what would become, in effect, their houses. I would like that model to be adopted in other parts of Scotland.

I accept that there is a difference in scale between housing stock transfer in the Borders—which involves 9,000 houses—and the proposal for Glasgow, where 90,000 houses will be transferred. However, as I said in a previous debate, we do not see the transfer of those 90,000 houses to a single housing association as a permanent arrangement. We support a second-phase transfer, of the sort to which Bill Aitken alluded.

I hope that the minister will confirm to us in writing that tenants' choice will be ended in the Borders, where it has had a corrosive influence. I would welcome the assurance that, when the stock is transferred to the new housing association, tenants' choice will cease. I am grateful to the minister for agreeing to look into this problem. We will explain it in more detail when she visits us in the Borders.

Kenny Gibson made an important point about the stimulation of local economies. If stock transfer takes place in the Borders, we will need a major investment in skills. We will have to call on not only the local enterprise company but the local further education college, to ensure that the required skills are available. In the past, the level of investment has been such that some of those skills have fallen into abeyance. The number of apprenticeships has dropped. Housing stock transfer offers a major opportunity to restore employment levels in the construction industry in places such as the Borders. I hope that in future we can do the same in Glasgow.

Liberal Democrat members have no hesitation in welcoming this policy and the minister's commitment to continuing with it. I hope that there can be a constructive debate in front of tenants and that there will be no scaremongering. The advantages of stock transfer should be explained to tenants so that, when the ballots take place, tenants will be able to make an open, free and fair decision against the background of proper information. I hope that the wholesale stock transfers will proceed, but only if that is the will of tenants.

12:15

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I have to be on my best behaviour today because my daughter is in the gallery.

Margaret Curran will be worried because I agree with much of what she said. As I said in the previous debate on this issue in September, the Scottish Conservatives support the concept of stock transfer as a positive way forward.

The SNP asserts that council tenants are being given Hobson's choice. The SNP is right to bemoan the lack of investment during the first few years of the Labour Government, as well as Labour's dictatorial linkage between investment and transfer that goes far further toward controlling local government than we did. However, it is wrong to decry the transfer option. It is a fundamental approach that, in the long term, will rid Scotland of its huge housing problems. Stock transfer is not only a means of accessing housing investment, although it does that in a way that the state could never manage and without the damaging economic consequences of hugely increased taxes and borrowing. By choosing transfer the tenants not only are choosing investment, but are choosing to liberate themselves and their communities from the stifling control of local government.

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

Mr Harding: I am sorry, but I do not have

enough time.

The transfer proposals will give tenants more say in the way that their estates are run, regenerate whole communities and, to echo yesterday's debate, will develop our civic society by giving tenants greater rights and responsibilities, and so bring social justice.

In Glasgow all the problems that exist throughout Scottish council housing are amplified in one place. Of the 87,000 houses that are to be transferred, most require major repairs and refurbishment. The council cannot make those repairs because the resources are not available. That leads to the conclusion that council housing has failed the Scottish people, especially the most vulnerable. That is especially true in Glasgow. Housing associations have delivered what tenants want in an affordable way. If people are given ownership of a problem, they will respond positively. Tenant representatives on housing association management committees are very keen to deal with the problems that blight council housing, such as rent arrears and anti-social behaviour. That is because they have the good of their community at heart.

The economics are such that the mortgage lenders see no difficulty in attracting the substantial investment that is needed to improve the housing stock on transfer and to bring job opportunities to the manual trades. That is not possible for councils, which are constrained by rigid Treasury rules. The massive injection of private investment brings its own disciplines that help to ensure realistic management of repairs for the future rather than a make-do attitude, which says that the state will eventually provide taxpayers' money, while tenants live in cold, damp houses.

The Scottish Conservatives realise that success or failure will hinge on the degree of linkage between communities and the new community landlords. The success of housing associations has been due largely to the fact that they are community based and local. The transfer of stock in Glasgow must be broken down quickly into smaller parts. Tenant management committee members want tangible results from their efforts. A limit must be placed on the initial size of the new landlord organisations to allow for that. That limit should be about 6,000 houses or fewer. That would not preclude joint purchasing of repairs services.

I confirm our support for the continuation of the policy that we introduced. We will continue to encourage the Executive to promote that policy, as long as it sticks to the principles on scale and local control on which the policy was founded.

12:18

The Minister for Social Justice (Jackie Baillie): The debate is yet another example of the SNP wasting the Parliament's time. It is another opportunity for the SNP to peddle even more confusion and distortion. The more cynical among us would perhaps be forgiven for making a connection with the Glasgow Anniesland by-election. It would be more helpful if the SNP could produce something credible. I challenge it to do that. Frankly, SNP housing policy is a mess. Let us consider it.

Policy 1 is where the SNP started— independence is the answer. In 1998 the SNP said that

"there are simply not the funds in the Scottish block allocated to pay for a proper solution."

An independent Scotland would have all the housing debt, taxes would go up and not one extra house would be built.

Policy 2 is that the UK Government is now the answer. The SNP national council wanted the UK Treasury to meet the costs of debt write-off. That write-off would be of not just housing debt, but all debt. We would constantly be going cap in hand.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the minister give way?

Jackie Baillie: No, I will not. I suggest that the SNP should grow up and take some responsibility.

Policy 3 was that devolution was the answer. Back in September's debate, Lloyd Quinan said that the former Deputy Minister for Local Government was

"well aware that we could deal with the debt problem through the powers that he and the Minister for Communities have within the Parliament."

In the same debate, policy 4 was revealed. Kenny Gibson, who was on message, got up and said that

"Scotland as an independent, sovereign state is the only way forward for Scottish housing".—[*Official Report*, 21 September 2000; Vol 8, c 610, 589.]

For goodness' sake, which is it? I would be grateful if SNP members made up their minds and stopped dithering. Instead of carping, they should focus on the issues.

We know the legacy of debt and disrepair that characterises public sector housing in Scotland. In Glasgow, there is a debt of £850 million and a backlog of repairs totalling £1.6 billion. However, stock transfer is not just about Glasgow. Seven councils are currently considering community ownership and a further 24 are undertaking feasibility studies across both urban and rural Scotland. We recognise the need to secure significant new investment in houses and to tackle housing debt. We must also promote community

empowerment, community control and, ultimately, community ownership. Radical solutions are necessary, and that is exactly what the Parliament and the Executive are offering.

Dorothy-Grace Elder *rose*—

Brian Adam *rose*—

Jackie Baillie: What is the SNP offering? Small-scale, area-by-area transfers that will take longer to achieve, will deprive tenants of much-needed investment now, and will leave tenants with 90 per cent of the debt. Fiona Hyslop tells us that the SNP would provide an additional £117 million for housing—yes, we are grateful—and would generate private finance, but I question how it would do that. What we are offered is a snappily titled “public service homes and community trust”, with no explanation of how it would avoid public sector borrowing requirement rules or lever in private finance—because everybody knows that it would not lever in extra private finance.

While we are on the subject of policy reviews—Fiona Hyslop is charged with reviewing the SNP’s policy—I suggest that consistency and coherence in SNP housing policy would be a welcome change. Is the SNP opposed to transfer or not? As is depressingly often the case with the SNP, it seeks to be all things to all people. SNP policy is not opposed to stock transfer, yet SNP members have missed no opportunity to spread fear and misinformation among tenants regarding the Executive’s plans. While national activists are prominent in campaigning against transfer, Fiona Hyslop’s colleagues in Dumfries and Galloway are supporting wholesale stock transfer. Which is it to be?

Fiona Hyslop: Will the minister give way on that point? That is misinformation.

Jackie Baillie: Although I regret the SNP’s confusion, I condemn the misinformation that is being peddled.

I hope that SNP members are aware that their candidate in Anniesland is saying that the Executive wants all council houses to be transferred to a private company. I have never heard such blatant nonsense in my life. We have made it clear that all transfer landlords will be non-profit making, with tenants in the lead. I hope that the SNP will stop that scaremongering. Stock transfer is not about privatisation; it is about putting people in charge. Is the SNP opposed to that?

Mr Gibson: Will the minister give way?

Jackie Baillie: I ask Mr Gibson to let me finish. The member who responds for the SNP can answer the points.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please begin to

wind up.

Tommy Sheridan: Can I ask a question, then? Is the minister opposed to the abolition of council housing in Glasgow?

Jackie Baillie: Is the SNP aware that its candidate in Glasgow is saying that Glasgow City Council is a bad landlord? The contradiction in the SNP’s position is that it would push more money at local authorities, causing more confusion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please come to a close.

Jackie Baillie: I will. Five minutes is not a great deal of time.

Housing stock transfer boils down to a choice. Fortunately, that choice is not up to the SNP or the inherently pessimistic Scottish Socialist Party. The choice is up to the tenants. They can choose between new investment to tackle the legacy of disrepair and allowing the situation stay the same; between tackling debt and lifting the crippling burden of debt and leaving it with the tenant.

Dorothy-Grace Elder *rose*—

Jackie Baillie: Do we have community ownership that puts tenants in the lead now, or do we follow the SNP and wait for decades while homes crumble? Such choices are for the tenants of Glasgow—of Scotland—and I know that they will reject the confusion and distortion of the SNP.

Fiona Hyslop: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The minister has taken no interventions and has run a minute and a half over her allocated time. As you were very strict about the times for speeches, will you please ask the minister to wind up?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps you have not heard me do so. I believe that the minister is on her very last sentence.

Jackie Baillie: She is indeed.

The SNP’s confusion and distortion will be rejected because people want better homes and communities and more jobs. Tenants want a radical solution to a pressing problem, and we will give them the choice because they deserve nothing less.

12:26

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Some time ago in the chamber, I called Wendy Alexander “the lecturing, hectoring minister”. I see that her apprentice has learned well from her.

The minister spoke about peddling confusion and would not take any interventions as she did so. However, I have never heard so much confusion from the Labour benches as I have

today.

Johann Lamont *rose—*

Linda Fabiani: Our motion says that we are opposed to wholesale stock transfer. I will repeat that: we are opposed to wholesale stock transfer. However, the motion does not say that we are opposed to the idea of stock transfer as such. For example, the facts that were given about what is happening in Dumfries and Galloway were wrong. SNP councillors there have moved for a moratorium on stock transfer until the housing bill has been introduced. Despite the millions of pounds that have been spent, the publication of a framework document in April and the promise of a housing bill for more than a year, Glasgow tenants are no nearer a solution than they were at previous parliamentary debates on the subject.

I was disappointed to hear the deputy minister say that the policy was not under review. I had hoped that the delay might have some positive aspects. For example, could it have been used to investigate the situation and review the policy? It is ridiculous that such an option was not even considered. The deputy minister said that partial transfers are appropriate in certain situations. If so, why is it not appropriate for Glasgow tenants to have the choice of partial transfer? What is wrong with Glasgow? Why can the city not be treated like everywhere else?

Ms Curran: Will Linda Fabiani give way?

Linda Fabiani: No, I will not give way, because Jackie Baillie did not allow any interventions and carried on far too long.

We must nail the myth that wholesale stock transfer is the only solution. At a Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee meeting on 2 February, David Comley said:

"If the current debt were removed and the council were able to borrow a sum that rental incomes could sustain, yes, we could achieve investment on a faster time scale."—*[Official Report, Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, 2 February 2000; c 573.]*

The Executive trusted that guy to head up its initial proposals, so ministers should not sit there and look as if they think that he does not know what he is talking about.

Ms Curran: Will Linda Fabiani take an intervention?

Linda Fabiani: No, I will not take an intervention. It works both ways.

Ms Curran: I have a point of information.

Linda Fabiani: No. We are getting used to having no information from the Executive.

We must also nail the myth that the SNP has a problem with community-based housing

associations and co-ops. That is not the case. Those associations are already established and I am proud of the ones in the west of Scotland, which have brilliant track records. They are run by people elected within the community and are serviced by highly committed paid staff.

Although those tried and tested organisations know their stuff, they have not been offered as alternative landlords for their tenants. Is that the great plan B that we have been hearing about? Wonderful. At another Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee meeting, members discussed that great plan in connection with the housing stock transfer report. A proposed recommendation said:

"The Scottish Executive should examine ways for its empowerment objectives to be achieved even where tenants choose not to pursue stock transfer as an option."

It is very disappointing that the deputy minister voted against the inclusion of that recommendation in the report.

Ms Curran: I think that, in fairness, Linda Fabiani should let me respond to that point.

Linda Fabiani: Okay.

Ms Curran: Fiona Hyslop mentioned that point in a previous debate. The reason why I voted against that proposal is clear. When we consider community empowerment in the Scottish housing sector, we must do so in the context of an examination of the whole of Scottish housing, not just an examination of housing stock transfer. When it is published, I hope that the housing bill will strongly reflect my commitment to tenant participation. There is more to the housing debate than housing stock transfer.

Linda Fabiani: I did not want a speech.

The fact of the matter is that Margaret Curran voted against the investigation of a plan B for the Glasgow stock transfer. Why is the Executive not considering the tried and tested model being used to offer new small-scale organisation in Glasgow's localities for local residents? Is it because it could be a more expensive option? It could be, but what price social inclusion? Is it because too many tenants would be empowered to make real change in their area and would become highly organised and demanding? I think that it is largely due to a mixture of the desire to keep Glasgow City Council happy and the Executive's patronising and maternal attitude to tenants in Scotland. Glasgow's tenants—and tenant activists across the country—are no numpties. They know what is going on and what the Executive is doing.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Linda Fabiani: No.

Tenants are smart folk, who are perfectly capable of taking informed decisions when they are offered realistic choices. The choice in the Glasgow stock transfer—wholesale stock transfer—is not realistic.

Robert Brown: Will the member give way?

Linda Fabiani: No, thank you.

Mr Stone: But he is a nice Liberal.

Linda Fabiani: He is not that nice.

This morning, Charlie McFadden from South Lanarkshire Tenants Confederation nobbled me outside the chamber and we had a quick chat about stock transfer in general and about the role of housing associations and housing co-operatives. I like community-based housing associations and co-operatives. Charlie McFadden does not.

Ms Curran: Does the member agree with privatisation?

Linda Fabiani: I will get on to that in a minute.

Perhaps Charlie McFadden and I will get together some time to discuss stock transfer further, but the point is that if we agree to differ, that is fine, because it is an informed choice. That is what Glasgow's tenants are not being offered. I know that new Labour has a problem with multi-option referenda, but the choice for Glasgow's tenants should be more than a choice between transferring in a wholesale stock transfer and getting money spent on their house or staying with the council, having their house fall down round about them and not getting central heating installed. Robert Brown tried to say that the Executive's proposal was the only option because of Treasury rules. That is rubbish. So many things could be done if we used imagination and we have heard many of them today.

It is a myth to pretend that wholesale stock transfer is the only solution. I believe that Scottish independence would be the best solution, but even under the limited devolution settlement there are things that the Executive could do to empower tenants, to give them real choice and to allow them to control their future. That is what is important.

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S1M-1358, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out the business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees (a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 22 November 2000

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Debate on Renewing Local Government Finance

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-1243 John Scott: SSSI, SPA and SAC Designations

Thursday 23 November 2000

9.30 am Standards Committee Debate on its Report on Investigation of Complaints and the Appointment of a Standards Commissioner

followed by Procedures Committee Debate on its Report on Parliamentary Questions

followed by Procedures Committee Debate on its Report on Changes to Standing Orders

followed by Stage 1 Debate on the Salmon Conservation (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3.30 pm Continuation of Stage 1 Debate on the Salmon Conservation (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-1218 Margaret Jamieson: Tinnitus

Wednesday 29 November 2000

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Ministerial Statement

followed by Executive Debate on Domestic Abuse

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 November 2000

9.30 am Scottish Conservative and Unionist
Party Business

followed by Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3.30 pm Executive Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

and, (b) that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee reports to the Transport and the Environment Committee by 28 November 2000 on the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2000—[*Tavish Scott.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As no member has asked to speak against the motion, I will put the question to the chamber. The question is, that motion S1M-1358, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

12:33

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before I begin this afternoon's business, I want to expand on the impromptu response that I made to Tommy Sheridan's point of order this morning about the selection of amendments. In that response, I referred to two criteria that I take into account in deciding whether to select amendments, namely the extent to which the amendment has supporters other than the mover of the amendment, and the number of competing amendments. By supporters, I mean those who have signed up as supporters, not an assessment of the likely level of support in the chamber. I also take into account other criteria, particularly the content of the amendment, in terms of its relevance to the subject matter of the motion, and whether the amendment alters significantly the content of the motion. In addition, at my discretion I take into account any other factors that I consider affect the exercise. I hope that that is a lengthier and clearer definition, which members can read in the *Official Report*.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Public Transport

1. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether adequate information on public transport timetables was available during recent severe weather conditions and, if not, what plans it has to address this issue. (S1O-2542)

The Minister for Transport (Sarah Boyack): I understand that during the recent severe weather conditions, the national rail inquiry service received many more calls than the system was capable of handling. Regrettably, that prevented provision of a normal service to the public. However, the implementation soon of a sustainable timetable, as part of the national track recovery plan, will assist with the provision of reliable information to rail users. In addition, as part of our programme for government, we intend to implement a multi-modal public transport information system, covering the whole of Scotland and the rest of Great Britain, by the end of December.

Dr Jackson: Will the minister investigate how more railway stations can be equipped with direct access to national rail facilities on the web, to give up-to-the-minute information to rail users?

Sarah Boyack: One of our objectives with the

new public transport information project is that, by the beginning of next year, people will be able to get information on bus and rail travel. For 2002, we intend to ensure that that information is available more widely on the web, and that any passenger delays can be conveyed using that technology.

I am keen to progress the objective that Sylvia Jackson suggested. By 2002, the internet, digital television and public access terminals should be plugged in to that information, not just for trains, but for bus, ferry and domestic air services.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Does the minister recall that when the improved timetable for the rail service between Edinburgh and Glasgow via Falkirk High was introduced last year, the service was hailed as ScotRail's flagship, with four trains per hour running on time? Recently, the service has deteriorated into an absolute shambles, with only two trains per hour, which usually run late. Will the minister tell ScotRail and Railtrack to get their act together urgently to improve that service for the general public?

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The question is about transport timetables.

Dennis Canavan: The trains are running late.

The Presiding Officer: I did not hear that.

Sarah Boyack: Dennis Canavan raises the relevant issue that when train times are altered, that information should be communicated efficiently and accurately to passengers. That was one of the key points that I made when I met representatives of the rail industry three weeks ago. It is important that the industry communicates its plans accurately. People who are undertaking journeys have a right to know that their trains will run and about any time delays that will be incurred. That is one of the core problems that we have had over the past few weeks.

Dennis Canavan is absolutely right; there have been horrific problems. There are track speed restrictions arising from work that is being carried out. We had the Polmont landslip, which was complicated further by the Winchburgh flooding incident. All those incidents mean that we need more accurate information for passengers, so that they know when their journeys will begin and end. That is only reasonable.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I understand the difficulties that the travelling public have experienced in recent weeks. The railway line that Dennis Canavan mentioned has inconvenienced me by affecting the time that it takes to travel to Edinburgh. Will the minister ensure that future improvement to services will involve transport operators—especially bus and rail operators—working

together to integrate their services and to ensure that the public are aware of the times of trains that meet buses? We must achieve that if we are to meet our objective of increasing use of public transport.

Sarah Boyack: That is a valid point. All the operators must work together. A key objective of the Transport (Scotland) Bill, which is going through stage 2, is to provide a much more stable environment in which the bus companies will operate. The companies will be required to provide information to local authorities, so that information can be posted where people are catching buses. The point about trains and buses linking together is important. We are keen to act on that, to deliver a more integrated, seamless travel opportunity for the public.

Anti-drugs Spending

2. Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what percentage of total anti-drugs spending was spent on (a) education and (b) rehabilitation in 1997-98 to 1999-2000 and what the projected figures are for 2000-01. (S1O-2539)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): The information requested is not held centrally.

The "Review of Executive Expenditure on Tackling Drug Misuse", published earlier this month, gave a snapshot of the position for 1999-2000. The report indicated a total spend of £141.5 million on specific and generic programmes; a further £191.42 million was identified as drug misuse-related costs from other programmes. The report identified that 16 per cent of the overall spend went on prevention, which covers schools and health education, community education, health promotion and other related matters, and that more than one third—38 per cent—went on treatment and rehabilitation work.

Trish Godman: I thank the minister for the figures on investment in rehabilitation and education. Is the effectiveness of those programmes monitored and assessed and, if so, how often? Is the information published?

Malcolm Chisholm: The Executive has launched a drug action plan. In the next three years, many changes will take place. We will seek more clarity from the drug action teams about how the money is spent. There will be more emphasis on monitoring how the money is spent. Most important, there will be a major injection of £100 million for the drug action plan. That will allow more community-based initiatives, a major expansion of rehabilitation services and more emphasis on education and prevention, following an evidence-based approach.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): From the minister's response, it appears that there can be no accurate analysis of where the funds are going. Am I correct in assuming that the figures do not take into account activity in the voluntary or charitable sector? Is not it a cause for concern that the Parliament has no coherent strategic overview of what we are doing to cope with the drug abuse problem?

Malcolm Chisholm: The snapshot figures that I gave tried to capture the voluntary sector as well as all the other parts of the drug programme. However, we shall certainly try to get a more comprehensive picture and to monitor more closely what drug action teams are doing with the considerable extra resources that are being provided over the next three years.

Economic Policy

3. Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how the Republic of Ireland's economic performance will influence its policies for the Scottish economy. (S1O-2537)

To ask the Scottish Executive what economic lessons it can learn from the Republic of Ireland.

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Ms Wendy Alexander): The Executive is always keen to learn from the experience of other countries, including the recent successes of the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Gibson: I thank the minister for her positive response, but is she aware that industrial production in the Republic of Ireland grew by 15 per cent over the past year, compared with 0.8 per cent in the United Kingdom, which is less than an eighth of the European Union average? Is she aware that growth in per capita income, employment and inward investment in the Republic continues to far outstrip the UK and Scotland? Does she agree with me—and with the First Minister's hero, Mario Cuomo—that until Scotland has the control over its economy that the Republic of Ireland and other independent nations enjoy, it will never achieve its full economic and social potential?

Ms Alexander: I, too, have had the opportunity to study the recent performance of the Republic of Ireland. The important lesson for us all is that that good performance in the past 10 years follows 60 years of poor economic performance by a nation that was divided by divorce and where the politics of partition dominated domestic politics.

As *The Economist* said, the other key factor for the past 10 years of good performance was

"dollops of European Union cash".

In that context, Scots would do well to reflect on the fact that, when it comes to dollops of cash, we

benefit from 120 per cent of average public expenditure in the rest of the UK.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): Further to that answer, would the minister care to comment on a statement made by Jim Powers, who was the chief economist at the Bank of Ireland group treasury? Mr Powers said:

"The one-size-fits-all interest rate is totally inappropriate for Ireland"

within the euro zone.

Will the minister use this opportunity to make it clear when the Labour party will start to campaign for entry into the euro?

Ms Alexander: Sorry—

The Presiding Officer: Minister, you puzzle me. Are you going to answer the question?

Ms Alexander: Could the member repeat his question?

Ben Wallace: Presiding Officer, I am well aware that the Labour party has problems with the euro and with whether the country will join or not.

Would the minister care to reflect on a statement made by Jim Powers, who was the chief economist at the Bank of Ireland group treasury? Mr Powers said:

"The one-size-fits-all interest rate is totally inappropriate for Ireland"

within the euro zone.

Will the minister use this opportunity to make it clear when the Labour party will start to campaign for entry into the euro?

Ms Alexander: I thank Ben Wallace for his question. Entry to the euro is not necessarily a matter of principle, but rather a matter of meeting the five convergence conditions that the British Government has laid out. When it is appropriate for us to join the euro, we will do so at the appropriate interest rate and when the other five appropriate tests have been met.

Prescription Drugs (Beta Interferon)

4. Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the drug beta interferon is subject to postcode prescribing. (S1O-2538)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): The prescribing of beta interferon is determined by the clinical needs of individual patients, the available evidence about that treatment and the clinical judgment of the specialists concerned.

The advice of the Health Technology Board for Scotland will give an expert view on the place of

beta interferon in the treatment of multiple sclerosis in Scotland.

Shona Robison: Will the Minister for Health and Community Care comment on the treatment of my constituent, Vivian Howie, who suffers from MS and whose neurologist at Ninewells said that she would be an ideal candidate for beta interferon? Tayside Health Board told her that she could not be given the drug because its budget of £70,000 had run out, but Fife Health Board told her that beta interferon could be prescribed for her if she were to move to Fife, because it prescribes to all who meet the medical criteria.

Does the minister agree that that is a classic case of postcode prescribing, and that Vivian Howie should not have to move to Fife to receive beta interferon? If the minister agrees, what will she do about my constituent's case?

Susan Deacon: The Executive is seeking to remove both the variations that exist across the country and the practice of postcode prescribing; that is explicit in Government policy. It is precisely for that reason, and because of our commitment not just to talk about those problems but to act on them, that the Health Technology Board for Scotland has been established, and that other work is taking place to provide a better national framework for the NHS in Scotland. Those steps will ensure that there is greater equity across the nation, not just in prescribing practice but in other aspects of care. That will be a key theme in the health plan that is to be published next month.

Shona Robison: My constituent, Vivian Howie, needs to know now whether she must pack her bags and move to Fife. What will the Minister for Health and Community Care do about her case?

Susan Deacon: I find it sad that, not for the first time, the SNP takes individual cases and complex matters of health and public policy and uses them to generate headlines and stories. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. Let us hear the answer.

Susan Deacon: Presiding Officer, if Opposition members would care to listen, they might get an answer to the question.

I have met many people from all over Scotland who suffer from MS. I have met many MS sufferers who have discussed beta interferon with me, and I have also discussed with the Multiple Sclerosis Society in Scotland a wide range of other issues relating to the service needs of people with MS. That is why I am considering carefully the Scottish needs assessment programme on the needs of MS sufferers, which was published only last week. That work will allow us to take practical action, rather than indulging in trading insults on the issue.

Transport (Disruptions)

5. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of the economic costs of recent transport disruptions. (S1O-2552)

The Minister for Transport (Sarah Boyack): An independent business survey and retail sales sources suggest that the initial economic impact of September's fuel blockades has been limited. The effects have not yet been fully reflected in Scottish Executive statistics. It is too early for the economic costs of transport disruptions caused by rail safety works and floods to be picked up, either in surveys or in economic statistics.

Lewis Macdonald: I look forward to that further information being made available. Does the minister agree that recent events have highlighted the need for increased investment and increased choice, especially for those people who travel in and out of cities such as Aberdeen daily? Will she confirm that the funding bid for Aberdeen commuter rail services, which was considered last week, is still very much a live bid that is on track for next year?

Sarah Boyack: I am happy to confirm that the funding for the railway stations at Inverurie, Dyce and Stonehaven is to go ahead, and that all three stations will be upgraded to a much higher standard. That should be a definite improvement for the passengers who use those stations.

We have asked those who are involved with the bid for the rest of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire to talk to the rail industry and to the shadow strategic rail authority, to consider some of the operational issues and to come back to the Scottish Executive next year for further discussion on opportunities for extending that award.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Does the minister agree that the real cost to the economy and the true cause of the recent transport disruption was not the legitimate protest against fuel prices, but the extortionate new Labour fuel taxation? Does she agree with the Minister of State at the Scotland Office, Brian Wilson, who finally admitted in the House of Commons this week that we have the highest fuel tax in Europe?

The Presiding Officer: Order. That supplementary was well wide of the question, Mr Ewing. We shall move to question 6.

Higher Still

6. Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will publish the review of implementation of higher still and, if so, when. (S1O-2519)

The Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (Mr Jack McConnell): We will publish the review of new national qualifications as soon as possible. My priority is to ensure that the views of teachers and other stakeholders are fully taken into account and that we produce a thorough report.

Michael Russell: I thank the minister for that reply; it is essential that stakeholders are consulted. When the review is published, will it consider the role of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools, whom many now regard as the advisers on policy, the mediators of information that comes to the Executive, and the people who are responsible for implementing policy? Will he ensure that that major issue is reviewed, either in the review of higher still or in further action by the minister?

Mr McConnell: The major issues will be decided by the 2,000 or so teachers who will be consulted as part of the review. I want to ensure that the issues that arise from that review are those that are identified by those teachers, and we must learn lessons from that process. I assure Michael Russell that, if that affects any part of my department, those lessons will be taken on board.

Flood Prevention

7. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what up-to-date guidance has been given to local authorities with a view to ensuring that they put in place effective permanent flood prevention measures. (S10-2515)

The Minister for Environment, Sport and Culture (Mr Sam Galbraith): On the provision of flood prevention measures, our guidance to local authorities is that the measures should be environmentally sustainable and of a standard that will reduce the flood risk to an appropriate level. Authorities are also advised, on a scheme-by-scheme basis, to take account of the implications of climate change.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Will the minister also confirm that advanced contingency measures are being worked up and prepared, in the Administration and by all local authorities in Scotland, so as to save life, livestock and property in the event of the future flooding that has been predicted?

Mr Galbraith: That question touches on two issues. There are immediate problems when floods arise, which must be dealt with in the short term. We are looking into better early warning systems and considering proposals for a flood helpline. On the longer-term issue of sustainable flood prevention systems, the solution is dependent on local authorities bringing forward

proposals. I ask all local authorities to consider the problems and present their ideas. In the past, we have never failed to fund such proposals.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Is the minister aware of any additional assistance that the Executive can provide to local authorities to enable them to pilot innovative methods of flood prevention, such as the hydro-science project that Dumfries and Galloway Council is investigating?

Mr Galbraith: The scheme that Dumfries and Galloway Council is considering is one of a number of innovative proposals that have been made. It is appropriate for all local authorities that have a responsibility in this area to consider the issues and to seek to prevent floods by following guidance about not building on floodplains; that should be elementary. Authorities should find out where problems exist and take short-term measures to combat them, while they develop the long-term measures that are needed to ensure that this scourge is removed. There is no doubt that, because of climate change, floods will be a recurring and increasing problem.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Does the minister recall that last week, during exchanges at First Minister's question time, we were advised that there would be consequential from John Prescott's announcement of an additional £50 million for England and Wales? Does he also recall that we were advised that a review would be aimed at speeding up the procedures that must be observed by our local authorities when they seek to implement major flood prevention schemes? Can the minister provide any clarification on those matters?

Mr Galbraith: The answer to both questions is yes.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Has the minister been made aware of WWF Scotland's wild rivers scheme, which was launched in detail last week? I believe that a few members of the Executive were present at the launch to hear what the WWF representatives had to say. Will extra money be made available to authorities up and down river catchment areas in Scotland, particularly those of the Tay and the Forth, to enable them to co-operate with one another?

Mr Galbraith: It is mandatory for any local authority that proposes a scheme to consult other authorities about that. There is no sense in building a flood defence mechanism that simply transfers the problem elsewhere.

I am aware of WWF's proposals, which are interesting and innovative, and will be of use. However, even if those proposals were implemented, water would still overflow current flood defences. We need to consider more sustainable long-term solutions.

The Presiding Officer: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Department of Social Security (Meetings)

9. Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met the Department of Social Security and what issues were discussed. (S1O-2516)

The Minister for Social Justice (Jackie Baillie): Meetings take place on a regular basis to discuss a range of matters. The Scottish Executive is aware of the importance of the role of the Department of Social Security in the pursuit of social justice and of the need to work closely with it to achieve our aims.

Mr Quinan: On many occasions, the Parliament has been told that detailed discussion has taken place with the Department of Social Security on housing benefit reform and its implications for the proposed mass housing stock transfer in Glasgow. In the interests of openness, will the minister ensure that the minutes of those meetings are made available to members of this Parliament?

Jackie Baillie: We have regular discussions with our colleagues in the Department of Social Security—about housing benefit, but also about children and pensioners. I hope that Mr Quinan welcomes the significant lifting of 70,000 children out of poverty and the new package for pensioners, which will benefit 900,000 pensioners in Scotland. We have discussed the issue of housing benefit with the DSS. There are no referrals by local authorities in the case of under-occupation—an issue that I know Mr Quinan cares deeply about—nor will there be any referrals in the future.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Is the minister aware of the massive rise in the number of rejected social fund applications, from 5,000 in 1996 to 362,000 last year? Does the minister know the reasons for that increase? Does she know how many Scots families on income support have had their social fund applications refused?

Jackie Baillie: As Mr Sheridan is aware, those are reserved matters. I do not know the detail of social fund rejections. Our approach is based on getting people back to work, and we have had significant success in doing that. Since 1997, 70,000 new jobs have been created in Scotland. There is now 70 per cent less youth unemployment in Scotland than there was in 1997, and long-term unemployment has been halved. I hope that the member welcomes the fact that people are getting back to work.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): I accept, and members all understand, that the matter is reserved. However, I would have thought that the minister would have been sufficiently

shocked by the difference between the previous and current numbers of rejected applications to the social fund to have a real interest in discovering how many of those applications were from Scots families. Will she do that?

Jackie Baillie: As Margo MacDonald has asked me to do so, I certainly will.

We have a real interest not only in ensuring that benefits are there as an adequate safety net for people, but in getting Scotland back to work. That is the basis of our approach to tackling poverty in this country.

The Presiding Officer: Question 10 has been withdrawn.

Child Welfare

11. Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to promote the welfare of children. (S1O-2550)

The Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (Nicol Stephen): The Scottish Executive gives very high priority to promoting the welfare of children through a range of initiatives. Our programme for government sets out the objective of all children having the best possible start in life. It commits us to a range of targets to help to achieve that goal, including nursery education for all three and four-year-olds whose parents want it and a major expansion of child care provision.

Mr McGrigor: I am glad to hear that.

If the Executive is so committed to the welfare of Scotland's children, can it explain why it has removed the designation of minister for children from the list of portfolios? Does it consider Europe and external affairs to be more pressing matters? Does not that show a disregard for young people's interests?

Nicol Stephen: I assure the Parliament that what Jamie McGrigor suggests is happening is not happening; quite the reverse is true. Unlike the previous situation, one of my specific roles and responsibilities as Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs will be children's services and children's welfare. The Cabinet still includes a minister for children; that is Jack McConnell.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Does the minister have any specific plans to support the pre-school care and education of children with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, especially in remote Highland areas?

Nicol Stephen: It is important to ensure that we have quality facilities across Scotland for children with special educational needs. Mainstreaming is

important. It is important to ensure that there is funding for schools so that, where parents want it, there is appropriate mainstreaming. I will examine that matter in greater detail. I now chair the special educational needs forum; the issue was raised at that forum this week.

I would be delighted to write to the member to give her further information if she raises specific examples with me.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): On the wider issue of the welfare of children, what plans does the minister have to protect children from terrible harm and to increase the number of police who track child pornography on the internet?

Nicol Stephen: The issue of the use of the internet in relation to threats to our children is topical this week.

The issue is sensitive. It would not be appropriate for me to give a gut reaction. The police have clear views on the matter, and expressed those views on the initiative that was proposed this week. The police track pornography on the internet and bring appropriate prosecutions. All members would support the work of the police on that important matter.

The security and protection of children is one of our highest priorities in relation to the rolling out of new services involving the internet for children in our schools.

St Mary's School, Dunblane

12. Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs will consider visiting St Mary's Episcopal Primary School in Dunblane to meet parents, pupils and teachers. (S1O-2521)

The Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (Mr Jack McConnell): I will be happy to consider any invitation from any school in Scotland as part of my programme of school visits over the next year.

Mr Monteith: I welcome the minister's open approach. In that new spirit of perestroika, will the minister consider, in his review of his policies, leaving the transfer of St Mary's from independent management to Stirling Council management firmly where it is—in the in tray?

Mr McConnell: I think that Mr Monteith is confusing perestroika and glasnost. Glasnost is the description of openness and transparency; perestroika is the description of restructuring, which is what is happening to St Mary's Episcopal Primary School in Dunblane. I have every confidence that Stirling Council will restructure St Mary's in a positive way that will protect the education of the children.

M74 (Property Disposal)

13. David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it has made in disposing of properties acquired by the Scottish Office during the construction of the M74. (S1O-2523)

The Minister for Transport (Sarah Boyack): A number of properties have been disposed of since 1991. Most of those that remain are adjacent to the latest section of motorway to be constructed. Surveys to establish the full extent of surplus land in that area are continuing and should soon be completed.

David Mundell: The minister will recall that I sent her some photos—[*Laughter*]*—that I had taken of some of those properties. Does she agree that some of the properties are in such an appalling state as to create an eyesore for local residents? If they were well maintained, those properties could provide valuable rural homes. With the onset of winter, surely some urgency is required in the disposal of those properties.*

Sarah Boyack: Mr Mundell sent me some very interesting illustrations—[*Laughter*]*—which I passed on to the relevant officials.*

The member's point is correct. When a major project such as this is being constructed, land is acquired to enable the operations to be carried out. We are now trying to identify the exact boundaries of some of the properties in which his constituents have a practical interest. We will pursue the matter with the contractor as soon as possible, so that such properties can be valued and go through the Crichton Down rules to be released for sale, where that is appropriate.

Planning (Ayr)

14. Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): I am sorry to say that I have not sent Mr Galbraith any pictures at all.

To ask the Scottish Executive why planning consent was refused for the retail development at Heathfield in Ayr while consent was granted for the associated construction of a football ground at the same site. (S1O-2536)

The Minister for Environment, Sport and Culture (Mr Sam Galbraith): The reasons for those decisions are given in the Scottish Executive's letter of 3 November. I am sure that everyone will understand that I am unable to say anything further, given that the applicant may exercise his right of appeal to the Court of Session.

Kay Ullrich: Is the minister totally unaware of the impact that that decision will have on the future of Ayr United? Can he explain why he chose to go against the recommendations of the local authority

and the two reporters to the public inquiry? Is Ayr United simply the latest victim of yet another cock-up by the minister?

Mr Galbraith: If Kay Ullrich sends me any pictures, I hope that they will be Peploes or Cadells.

That question is the height of irresponsibility, following the initial answer that I gave. For legal reasons, I cannot say anything further. Any decent politician would have accepted that answer, not responded with an irresponsible question.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Can the minister advise us of the overall cost of the planning inquiry into the Ayr United stadium and retail developments? Does he feel that he has received value for money from that planning inquiry, given his rejection of the reporter's findings? Does he feel that that is best value in terms of cash, public confidence and time?

Mr Galbraith: The cost to the Executive was £39,000, which I consider to be good value and a splendid use of money.

Standards in Schools

15. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what priorities it has set to improve standards in schools. (S10-2531)

The Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (Mr Jack McConnell): The national priorities for school education were set out in a draft order laid on 6 November for the Parliament's approval. They set out our clear intention to improve attainment, deliver quality of opportunity, create a strong and healthy learning environment and encourage ambitious, considerate and creative young adults.

Karen Whitefield: Does the minister agree that we must ensure that our teachers are not overburdened with bureaucracy at the expense of teaching and preparation?

Furthermore, a teacher in my constituency feels frustrated at taking home bags of forms for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Does the minister agree that a overhaul of bureaucracy is needed to reduce the work load of teachers?

Mr McConnell: Teachers should teach, and those who enter the teaching profession do so in order to impart knowledge and encourage ambition and creativity in children. Anything that we can do to reduce the paperwork and bureaucracy that goes with the job and to ensure that the system supports the teachers, instead of the other way round, is worth doing. I hope that that reassures any teacher from Airdrie, Shotts or any of the surrounding villages that Karen Whitefield might want to mention.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister consider measures for early diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders, to ensure that all children have the opportunity to improve their standards?

Mr McConnell: As the national priorities for education make clear, all children must have the opportunity for a high-quality education and the system should support that aim in every possible way. That will require the education system not only to identify special needs at a very early age, but to work closely with children's services, the health service and other agencies and public bodies, to ensure that all children can grow to their full potential from the earliest possible age.

Scottish Natural Heritage

16. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to review the pre-designation public consultation procedures by Scottish Natural Heritage in respect of special areas of conservation and sites of special scientific interest. (S10-2533)

The Minister for Environment, Sport and Culture (Mr Sam Galbraith): I am considering proposals for improvements to the nature conservation system in Scotland, including the way in which people are consulted about the designation of protected areas. In the meantime, we are obliged by European commitments to press ahead very quickly with the selection of candidate special areas of conservation, and SNH is taking forward the notification of SSSIs to protect European sites.

Mr Stone: I welcome the minister's answer, because the apparent parachuting-in of designations in the past did not receive much community support.

Given that recent proposals to designate the whole of the Moray firth as an SAC have caused much concern among fishermen in my constituency, will the minister give a reassurance that their livelihoods will not be undermined by that designation?

Mr Galbraith: As the member knows, this site was first notified to the European Union in order to protect bottle-nosed dolphins. However, the recent area of concern is the fact that the sandbanks that are always covered by at least a small amount of water are being added to the notification. I assure Mr Stone that there are no plans to change the management structure or plan for that area and that there is no intention whatsoever to interfere with fishing.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Is the minister aware that many people affected by these designations feel that they are not based on adequate scientific

evaluation? Will he delay the introduction of the designations until such evaluations are properly carried out?

Mr Galbraith: The evaluations are properly carried out. Sites can be designated only on scientific grounds and full consultation is considered in that process. Furthermore, when Lord James Douglas-Hamilton was the relevant Government minister, an appeals committee was introduced to consider the scientific basis of the designation. As a result, there is a sufficient appeals mechanism.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Is the minister aware of the huge opposition of the local community in Islay to the designation of a seal sanctuary off the south-east Skerries? Will he take that opposition into consideration before any final decisions are made?

Mr Galbraith: As I said, the areas are designated on scientific grounds by SNH and ministers have to accept them. It is important when we consider such designations that all the local stakeholders are consulted and that their views are taken into consideration. Once SSSIs are in place, we must ensure that there are positive management policies, for which money will be available, so that the local community can be fully involved in the management of sites.

First Minister's Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to raise. (S1F-661)

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): I speak regularly to the Secretary of State for Scotland on the telephone, but I have no immediate plans to meet him.

Mr Swinney: When he next meets the Secretary of State for Scotland or talks to him on the telephone, will the First Minister discuss unemployment in Scotland? The SNP welcomes any new jobs created in Scotland and any decline in unemployment. However, I draw the First Minister's attention to some worrying new research that landed on my desk this morning from the Scottish Parliament information centre, which shows that only half the people who have left the unemployment register in the past year have gone into employment. Is the First Minister aware of that fact, and is he satisfied with it?

The First Minister: The Administration wants to trumpet full employment. We also want to ensure that when people leave the register, they end up either in productive work or in training or education that enhances their opportunities. If there is evidence, we want to examine it, but the figures are excellent—unemployment continues to go down and there has been a cut of 5,000 in the International Labour Organisation figures. Those figures are welcome. In addition, we have record levels of employment in Scotland, low levels of unemployment and an economy that is moving forward. Everybody in the chamber should welcome that.

Mr Swinney: Does the First Minister accept that many of the points that he made could have been made by Michael Forsyth, Ian Lang or Malcolm Rifkind, speaking about the way in which they went about things? We have a First Minister who makes second-hand excuses for the previous Administration. From his answer, am I to assume that the First Minister accepts the research that I have presented to Parliament today, which shows that of the people coming off the unemployment register, only half go into employment? Yes or no?

The First Minister: Another yes-or-no question. If John Swinney takes employment and unemployment seriously, he will listen to what I said. If he wants me to look at any bit of research in Scotland, that is fine. However, the key issue

about lowering the number of people on the unemployment register is to get people into productive work, which is employment, or into education, training or skills enhancement.

The issue is far more complex than John Swinney would have us believe. As for his suggestion about Ian Lang and Michael Forsyth, the answer is no, because they never had the privilege of being able to say that full employment could be a reality in their generation. They did not have the benefit of being able to say that we have the highest employment figures since 1966 and the lowest unemployment since 1976. If anyone wants evidence of real economic success, they have it.

Mr Swinney: I am afraid that the First Minister has not listened to some of his ministers. The Minister for Social Justice, in response to my colleague Mr Quinan, has just said that the Government's priority is to get people back to work. I took that as a measure of the Government's priorities, but let us move on.

The Government is undertaking a policy review with Mr McCabe at the helm. Will the First Minister give Parliament an assurance that he will propose solutions—specific new initiatives—that address the fact that 50 per cent of the people leaving the register are not going into employment, or is that something he leaves to his friends at Westminster to decide? Will the First Minister give us first-class answers rather than second-hand excuses?

The First Minister: It is evident that we have no shortage of second-hand questions.

This is a ridiculous situation for any party leader to be suggesting. I have made the point that we have low figures for unemployment and high figures for employment. It seems to me that the balance of advantage between the two is right. Forgive me for repeating myself, Sir David, but if people leave the register, they want to go into productive work, education, training or skills enhancement.

Let us not forget a fact that the SNP might want us to forget: we have the possibility of getting the unemployment claimant count in Scotland below 100,000. Also, if the figures for vacancies in job centres are multiplied by three, as John Swinney has done, we have more than 120,000 vacancies. The SNP peddles dismal stories, but we have a success story on our hands, which everyone in the chamber should welcome.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues he plans to raise. (S1F-662)

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): I last met the Prime Minister on 23 October. I have no immediate plans to meet him again.

David McLetchie: I wonder whether, when he next meets the Prime Minister, the First Minister will raise with him the issue of the link between the number of Scottish MPs in Westminster and the number of MSPs in the Scottish Parliament, which was enshrined in the Scotland Act 1998.

This week, the First Minister was reported as saying that he wanted to end that link and he is now busily engaged in a rewriting of history. Before all the errors are snopaked out, would he remind us who was responsible for piloting the Scotland Act through the House of Commons and why he voted against Conservative amendments that would have broken that link? As Hardy might have said—let me just find my piece of paper—“Is this not another fine mess you have got us into and another residue of a badly drafted piece of legislation?”

The First Minister: I think I enjoyed the pause more than I enjoyed the question. Sir David—

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I am quite sure that the First Minister enjoyed the pause more; the question is highly embarrassing for him.

The First Minister: I apologise for being distracted by another sedentary intervention from Phil Gallie.

This is an important issue for Scotland. I should have the support of the whole Parliament when I say that, when the legislation went through, the Scottish Parliament did not exist and neither did the Scottish Executive. It makes sense for this Parliament to say that the political circumstances have changed since that event. I have always been a believer in flexibility.

My position—and I hope it has the support of David McLetchie—is that, as we unfold the boundary review of the number of MPs going to Westminster, we will have to consider seriously the issue of the automatic link between the numbers of members in Westminster and Holyrood. That is pragmatic, sensible and reflects the new circumstances. I invite David McLetchie to support the position that I am making public today in the chamber and which I also made public on a television programme earlier in the week.

David McLetchie: Of course we support the position. We were the ones who got it right two years ago; the First Minister is the one who got it wrong. We welcome this latter-day conversion on the road to Damascus.

Another legacy of the Scotland Act is the dual mandate. On a day when 70,000 council workers throughout Scotland are on strike, can the First Minister tell us whether he thinks that it is right that

he, his new-found friend Dennis Canavan, the self-styled workers' champion Sam Galbraith and Malcolm Chisholm should receive golden handshakes of up to £48,000 for giving up their Westminster seats when, as MSPs, they already receive far more than the council workers could ever dream of? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Order. Let us hear the answer, please.

The First Minister: The problem that Mr McLetchie describes is not one that the Conservative party will face, given the results of the 1997 election. There are few Conservative MPs who will be in a position to accept money as a result of the dual mandate situation.

This is a serious subject and I have made my position clear. I will not benefit from what it has been suggested that certain MPs will get from Westminster. I also defend the right of every MSP who is also an MP to consider their own situation and make a judgment. I do not want to pry into the financial affairs of any member, but I put on record that I will not take financial advantage of the situation. I hope that David McLetchie will acknowledge that that is an honest response, which leaves it open for other members to make individual judgments on the matter.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): When the First Minister next meets the Prime Minister, will they reflect on the issues relating to unemployment that John Swinney raised a moment ago? Will they reflect on the fact that only one in three of the people who had been long-term unemployed and who left the register found work, and that only 7 per cent of those people moved on to training schemes? Is it not the case that those people are leaving the register and going out of the Government's mind, although the Government should be paying attention to them?

The First Minister: Some of my colleagues are slightly puzzled by this question, because I thought that I was asked why 50 per cent of people leaving the register did not end up anywhere.

Andrew Wilson: I asked about the long-term unemployed.

The First Minister: We are now jumping to the long-term unemployed. Let me give members a bit of good news. There has been an enormous reduction in the number of long-term unemployed since Labour came to power in 1997. The efforts of the leader of the Opposition and the shadow finance minister are touching on the margins of this important issue. We have said that people should leave the benefits register with a purpose, and they are doing so. The simple fact that the SNP cannot erase is that employment is at a record high in Scotland and unemployment is at a

record low. Those two figures represent a substantial boost to the Scottish economy. The hallmark of this Administration will be full employment.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Will the First Minister ask the SNP where unemployment comes in its list of priorities after its top priority, which is a referendum on the constitution?

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister is not responsible for what the Opposition parties do.

BSE

4. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): To ask the First Minister what measures the Scottish Executive will take to reassure people on the public health implications of recent reports of inadequate BSE controls in France. (S1F-655)

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): On questions of food safety the Scottish Executive is advised by the Food Standards Agency. The agency welcomes the more stringent BSE-related controls that are now applied in France and across the European Union. Such controls have been common in the UK for many years. The agency has made it clear that it will move swiftly if there is evidence that imports from any overseas country constitute an unacceptable risk.

George Lyon: Does the First Minister agree that measures that have been taken in Scotland, such as the ban on the feeding of meat and bonemeal to animals, including pigs and poultry, the over-30-months scheme under which we slaughter every animal that is over 30 months of age, the removal of specified risk material, and some of the tightest regulations of any abattoir industry in the world mean that Scotch beef is the best and safest product in the world? In view of the rise in the number of cases of BSE in countries such as France, can he assure me that he and his ministers are pressing the European Commission to come up to the same standards that we have to meet in Scotland?

The First Minister: I share the sentiments on this that George Lyon has expressed. The very much higher level of BSE in Britain continues to justify our stringent controls. However, the Food Standards Agency will expect the new French controls to apply to any exports to the UK and will pursue the matter with the European Commission and the French authorities. The Executive wants to press the Commission to ensure that the stringent controls that we have developed in this country are applied in every part of the European Union. We owe it to consumers, farmers and our colleagues in Europe to ensure that those colleagues learn from the best steps that have been taken. I assure George Lyon that we will be

to the fore in pressing home those points.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): How can the people of Scotland be reassured, given that the Scottish Executive did not attend the agriculture council on 23 October and that the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Joyce Quin, did not arrange to put this matter on the agenda, even though it was known by mid-October that the French BSE crisis existed? All the unionist parties claim that Scotland has great clout because it belongs to the UK in Europe. Is this an example of that great clout?

The First Minister: Winnie Ewing is fundamentally wrong in principle and in her political analysis. We are part of the United Kingdom—that is the settlement. It is largely ludicrous for the SNP to suggest, in the way that SNP members do, that we are not as involved and as committed. In every Executive department we work closely with our colleagues. It trivialises an issue of European-wide significance that is of great significance for our farmers and consumers to reduce it to Edinburgh versus London, Scotland versus England—more like a football match than a serious consideration of important issues.

Public Bodies

5. Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive intends to set a target for a reduction in the number of quangos in Scotland. (S1F-656)

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): Our overriding objective is to ensure value for public money to the people of Scotland. That is why our starting point will be to ask the fundamental why question of every public body. Each body will need to convince the Executive that it should continue to exist and that it carries out its functions effectively and efficiently. If not, it will be abolished and its functions carried out in another way.

Mr Home Robertson: Honestly, that was not a planted question. I welcome the Executive's pragmatic bonfire. Is the First Minister aware that, when I was at the rural affairs department, I was asking fundamental questions about the Forestry Commission, a quango that is responsible for around 17 per cent of the land area of Scotland?

How can we tolerate a situation where the unelected Forestry Commission has the power but elected ministers are left to pick up the tab? I was still waiting for answers to some of my questions when I left the department. I urge the First Minister and the Executive to include the Forestry Commission in a radical review of Scotland's quangos.

The First Minister: I have an early meeting with

Andrew Smith at the Treasury in relation to the Forestry Commission. I acknowledge John Home Robertson's concerns and am happy to discuss them further with him. *[Interruption.]* The question of quangos is important for Scotland. The situation, if the SNP would listen for a moment—

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: We now have a Scottish Parliament and an Executive. That was a major constitutional change. Local government is being reformed and renewed. It is essential that we look at the very important area of quangos, which spend nearly £6 billion of public funds. I hope that that will have the support of the whole Parliament. Surely we must want to strengthen scrutiny and accountability, and if we find that a journey for a quango is no longer necessary, that journey should be terminated.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the First Minister indicate when he hopes to conclude the review of the quangos and when the parallel review of the system of public appointments will be completed and announced? Does he have a target number in mind for the reduction of quangos? Will the Executive support my member's bill to democratise public appointments in Scotland?

The First Minister: I can answer some of Alex Neil's questions, but not the latter point. We want the review to be done speedily. There is likely to be an outline paper to Cabinet before Christmas the implications and details of which will ultimately be made available to Parliament. I very much want to see consensus on the issue. Public money and the way we do business in Scotland is important to Alex's party as well as to mine, and to others. We will move very quickly. The paper will include the point about an appointments commissioner. I hope that, early in the new year, the Parliament as a whole can tackle this radical issue.

Paediatric and Maternity Services

6. Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Skin and teeth come to mind, First Minister.

To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive will issue guidance to health boards regarding their provision of paediatric and maternity services. (S1F-659)

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): The national acute services review, published in 1997, set out a pattern for specialist paediatric services in Scotland. Early in the new year, the Scottish Executive will be publishing a framework for maternity services. Both documents will guide health boards and NHS trusts in the planning and delivery of paediatric and maternity services across Scotland.

Nick Johnston: Is the First Minister aware that

large areas of Scotland are at risk of having inadequate access to acute maternity and paediatric services as the different health boards configure their acute services independently of one another? How far does the First Minister think it is right for women and children to travel to access care?

Is the First Minister aware that changes made to services in Stirling, and the threatened withdrawal of acute paediatric and maternity services at Perth royal infirmary, mean that women and children in a large area of central Scotland will be left with no easily accessible services at all? Is it the stated intention of the Executive—

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Nick Johnston: This is my last question, Sir David.

The Presiding Officer: You are supposed to ask only one question.

Nick Johnston: Is it the stated intention of the Executive to condemn the women and children of Scotland to second-rate health care, or will the Executive simply let that happen by default?

The First Minister: Nothing will happen by default in a major and sensitive set of services. We want everyone to have access to services, and they do have access. There are debates in Tayside and the Forth valley about the nature of service provision. As far as specialist paediatric services are concerned, we are looking into neurosurgery and the transport of critically ill and injured children.

As I have said, early in the new year, we will be taking a detailed look into maternity services. It is the hallmark of this Administration that we take health very seriously indeed. It is of major importance to the people of Scotland, and it is one area where we want to improve services. Susan Deacon and the Executive will not let anyone down in the areas of maternity and paediatric services.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Given the question mark over maternity services in Caithness, does the First Minister agree that any proposal that expectant mums should travel more than 100 miles from Caithness down to Inverness would be entirely unacceptable?

The First Minister: We are one country, but there are different problems in different parts of it. In any reviews that we undertake, we are mindful of the question of distance and of the particular problems in rural areas.

Points of Order

15:32

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Last year I lodged a question, which did not make it into the business bulletin. It asked whether you could give guarantees to MSPs on the security of our e-mails and internal communications. I have not yet received a reply, although we had a meeting with you and the chief executive of the Parliament at which you said that you would write back to me. I have as yet received no reply. Can you tell me when I will receive a reply?

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I will look into that. I recall the issue and I am surprised that you have not had a reply.

Mr Quinan: On a second point of order. You were going to look into whether the Presiding Officer should be required to answer oral questions—the standing orders of the Parliament say that that can happen. You have failed to reply to me on that question, too.

The Presiding Officer: I can assure you that the matter is under active consideration by the Procedures Committee.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): On a point of order. I should have declared an interest before my supplementary to Jamie Stone's question. May I do so now?

The Presiding Officer: That is all right, thank you.

Pre-Budget Statement

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The main item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S1M-1357, in the name of Henry McLeish, on the implications for the Scottish Executive of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's pre-budget statement, and an amendment to that motion.

15:34

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): I welcome the opportunity to speak to Parliament about the pre-budget report that was presented last week by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I warmly welcome the chancellor's statement. It is clear to everyone that his skilful direction of the United Kingdom economy has laid the ideal foundations for the programmes that I am now taking forward with renewed vigour with colleagues in Scotland.

One of the key objectives of the chancellor's report is to deliver, through growth and productivity, full employment for all in our generation. Already, we have created 86,000 jobs in Scotland since 1997 and employment now stands at the highest level since records began in 1960. Our long-term ambition is that a greater proportion of people should be in work than ever before. Currently, 73.4 per cent of Scots of working age are in employment—that is a higher percentage than at any point in the past 20 years.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Does the First Minister agree that, when we consider social justice, it is not enough just to get people into work if the wages that they are paid are inadequate? Does he agree that we are in danger of continuing to make not only the unemployed but the employed poor unless we set a higher minimum wage?

The First Minister: It is important to point out that we introduced the minimum wage, which was a significant step forward. The family income guarantee has also been a considerable help to those who are in work but who have had a low income. I understand the aspiration and we must ensure that people do not move out of unemployment into work that is not paying. The Government has shown its intent on both those fronts.

We want to do more in relation to our aspiration for full employment. I want to concentrate today on how we intend to achieve full employment and the employability of all Scots. I will illustrate how the pre-budget report helps us further in meeting our social justice objectives.

We have already discussed the economic

framework for Scotland, which has provided the macro-economic stability that we need. Against that background, inflation is down to 2.25 per cent in 2000. Interest rates are low by recent standards and have been stable since February. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has brought stability to the fiscal accounts for long-term sustainable economic growth. Moreover, UK gross domestic product has grown strongly for many years and growth will be around 3 per cent this year.

In consequence, unemployment in Scotland stands at 6.9 per cent according to the International Labour Organisation figures; the claimant count figures show unemployment at 4.6 per cent. We have grown continuously and steadily since the early 1990s. However, there should be no hint of complacency. Part of our economic challenge is a higher growth rate in Scotland, which demands competitiveness and productivity. We should be clear that achieving macro-economic stability is a feat that has escaped many Governments, which is all the more reason to welcome it now.

The union with the rest of the UK is providing us with the stability and economic strength to make record resources available to meet our priority commitments. Spending review 2000 has provided a real-terms increase of almost 14 per cent over the next three years, which we are now directing to key programmes on the economy, social justice, education and health. That demonstrates the fruits of a strong UK economy. We should all welcome the fact that partnership for Scotland means progress.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the First Minister reflect on the following quote?

"The Chancellor will still have spent in this Parliament less of the national cake on education and health than the Conservatives did".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 8 November 2000; Vol 356, c 333.]

That is not an SNP quote, but one from the economy spokesman of Jim Wallace's party—Matthew Taylor of the Liberal Democrats.

The First Minister: The SNP makes such claims constantly. However, it is important to point out to the people of Scotland that, regardless of talk about previous Conservative Administrations, the result of the spending review is that the Scottish Parliament will have a record budget and sustainable growth. We are interested in the politics of the future, rather than the dreary politics of the past, which are so keenly embraced by the SNP.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): We are the future.

The First Minister: I disagree. The SNP has a set of old and weary policies, which are uncoded, unquantified and badly focused. We do not have

to hear any lectures from the nationalists about where the economy is going.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): A moment ago, the First Minister mentioned productivity in Scottish business. Will he reflect on the fact that some companies make great efforts to improve productivity only to have their achievements skewered and undermined by the chancellor's macro-economic policies, his fiscal decisions and the impact that they have on interest rates? Does the First Minister acknowledge that connection and recognise the frustration of business when the Government says one thing but does another?

The First Minister: The chancellor has provided low interest rates, low inflation and sustainable, strong public funding for our services. I acknowledge John Swinney's point about productivity, which is why I referred to productivity in my initial remarks. We could be doing much better. That is the key to economic success. The chancellor is working with the grain of Scottish and UK business rather than against it.

Let me focus on full employment and the many challenges that lie ahead. Although macro-economic levers are concentrated at Westminster, we have significant levers to bring about change in Scotland. Those levers are the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament and we must use them, particularly in higher and further education, to equip Scotland with the skills that it requires.

In creating economic opportunities for all our people, we are concerned not only to build up the skills of those who are currently in the work force, but to make sure that those who are coming into the labour market from school have skills as well. In a nutshell, we need to improve the efficiency of the labour market and the skills of all those who can participate in and benefit from our economic progress.

On matching vacancies with the unemployed, some people will find it curious that we have 120,000 vacancies in Scotland and 112,000 people who are out of work. Clearly, there is no simple match, because there is a skills gap and various barriers to people getting into work. I suggest to all my colleagues in the chamber that we need to work in a more focused way to match the jobs that exist with the people who are looking for work. That means looking at pay, as Tommy Sheridan said. It means looking at literacy and skills and utilising the desire for work that everyone has to match people to the opportunities that exist in every part of the country.

That is why in August we brought together a 12-point action plan to provide local plans, not just a national UK or a Scottish framework for economic development. There will be a local action plan in

each area so that we can start to do some of the focused work that will undoubtedly reduce the unemployment queues even further. The rich mix of policy initiatives at Holyrood and Westminster will win success for this country. It is a clear demonstration of the huge benefits of working in tandem with our UK partners in addressing our Scottish vision.

Of course, full employment and the economy are vital, because they are the foundation on which we can build social justice in the way that we wish. That is why it is crucial to recognise that we have injected an extra £6 billion into Scottish services over the next three years. That includes a 15 per cent increase in health spending over the three years, a 17 per cent increase in education spending and a 20 per cent increase in the social justice and housing budget.

It would be churlish of us not to applaud what the Chancellor of the Exchequer has done for pensioners. Significant improvements have been announced, which will come in at the next budget. It is important to recognise that the Executive is complementing those measures and is addressing the plight of our 900,000 pensioners with free central heating systems for 70,000 pensioners, free off-peak bus travel for our pensioners and an investment of more than £120 million in community care. Those are substantial sums of money but, more important, they are targeted on real need in Scotland, which is much welcomed in pensioner households.

We have to acknowledge the geography of Scotland. That is why rural Scotland should be given a much higher profile in this Parliament and in the work of the Executive. Having spoken to Susan Deacon, I know that that issue is to the fore in health. Special problems and special needs have to be taken care of. Only then will this Parliament be able to welcome the involvement of every part of Scotland in what we are doing.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I am heartened to hear the First Minister say that he is concerned about the problems in rural Scotland. Does he accept the findings of the Automobile Association report that was released today? It said that, on average, the rural driver, who has to travel further and pay higher fuel costs, will suffer each year a surcharge of £300 on fuel and £160 on additional maintenance costs for his car. If he accepts that, what will he do about it? Does he agree that the pre-budget statement is bad not only for rural Scotland, but for the environment?

The First Minister: I think that I can rise to the question. I was more interested in what Fergus Ewing was quoted as saying in *The Courier and Advertiser* on Wednesday this week:

"We have the highest fuel tax in the world and the fact that it's set by a Scotsman is outrageous."

The complaint used to be "London Labour", but now it is "London Labour led by Scotsmen". I reject utterly that narrow, parochial thinking, which Fergus Ewing often expresses in this chamber. We all acknowledge that there are difficulties in relation to fuel. That is why the Chancellor of the Exchequer responded to farmers, hauliers and motorists. That is why he responded to the pleas that had been made on behalf of pensioners. Our policies on inner cities and rural areas have also brought substantial benefits. When on earth will Fergus Ewing realise that he cannot continue to rant day in and day out about problems that bear no relationship to reality?

We were talking about pensioners, for whom our Executive budgets also provide a way forward.

Rural areas are crucial. The rural dimension is serious. It cannot have escaped anyone's notice that, throughout the fuel demonstrations over the past few months, the big issue for Scotland has been what is happening in the Highlands and Islands. However, that seemed to disappear off the agenda, because the issue was UK-wide. In the next few months before the chancellor's budget, I would like to ensure that we return to some of the issues that are particular to the Highlands and Islands and that have no similarities to issues in any other part of the United Kingdom. Jim Wallace will develop those ideas.

Tommy Sheridan: I do not wish to deflect the First Minister's attention from rural areas but, as a member who represents Glasgow, I often feel that Glasgow is neglected. Will the First Minister give an assurance that the policy review will at least consider the capital receipts clawback rule?

The First Minister: I say to Tommy Sheridan that Glasgow is not missing out on what the chancellor or the Executive are doing in Scotland. Housing, economy and education projects are boosting the city. We will announce—at the start of next week, I think—an initiative to ensure that our cities share even more in the prosperity that lies ahead. That will go some way towards answering Tommy Sheridan's concerns. Those matters may have to be downplayed slightly in today's brief debate.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): The First Minister talked about housing in Glasgow. Is he aware of the delay to the Glasgow ballot? Is he also aware that Glasgow has lost out to the tune of more than £170 million in housing investment since new Labour came to power three years ago?

The First Minister: I am conscious that we want to take the people of Glasgow with us. That is important. Every time that a comment is made about Glasgow, we tend to forget that the Glasgow

tenants will decide their own future. That is democratic and positive, yet the SNP sometimes seems to argue against it. I believe that we are on track to achieve significant change in Glasgow, which will be in its interests. Glasgow will act as a beacon throughout the country for positive policies on housing.

Tommy Sheridan: What about the capital receipts clawback rule?

The First Minister: The stock transfer is a new exercise to promote housing. It will open up a tremendous opportunity to invest and to improve the quality of stock. We should be more concerned about that than about the capital receipts issue.

I have talked about a range of policies and will conclude with education. An extra £17.2 million will be provided for Scotland's schools. The Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs will be making a statement about that next week. In addition, there will be a further £0.5 million for e-learning in our schools.

At the heart of the Executive's vision is our objective of full employment, with all Scots having the capacity and the opportunity to play a full part in the nation's economic progress. The pre-budget report makes a major contribution to that vision. It is the UK's critical contribution to our objectives. We must now focus on what we can achieve in Scotland. I look forward to the Parliament joining the Executive in ensuring that we can drive forward on those vital areas to improve the quality of life, to ensure that full employment becomes a reality and to make Scotland a more confident, competitive and caring country.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the implications of the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement for the Scottish Executive.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The speakers list is very thin. Will any members who have not yet pressed their request-to-speak buttons please do so now?

15:49

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): If I take the hint from your message, Presiding Officer, I may prepare myself for a long oration to Parliament. I hope that members are ready for that, although I see the Deputy First Minister expressing his usual enthusiasm. I may include in my remarks some optimism about his prospects in office or the work of the Liberal Democrat economy spokesperson at Westminster, but we will see what the debate throws up.

I say at the outset that it would be churlish if we did not welcome a number of the measures in the pre-budget statement. Over the past few days, we

have made it clear that we give a warm welcome to some of the substantive measures. We welcome the above-inflation increases in the basic state pension for 2001-02 and 2002-03 and the increase in winter fuel payments from £150 to £200. I noticed that, the other day, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs intervened in the Anniesland by-election to remind us of that increase. We also welcome the substantial increase in the minimum income guarantee, which will assist in protecting some of pensioners' incomes, but we express a cautionary note in relation to the extension of means-testing to a greater number of people in the system.

We welcome any action taken by the chancellor to reduce the crippling burden of fuel duty and I take particular note of the freezing of the level of duty for two years. However, the chancellor's comments on low-sulphur fuel require a little examination. All his commitments to reduce the duty on low-sulphur fuel are conditional on, as he said in his statement to the House of Commons, "cheaper, cleaner fuel" being "available in every garage" in the country. That will take some considerable time to achieve and passes the responsibility from the Government to the oil companies. It is, therefore, outwith the Government's ability to deliver on that commitment. I want ministers in the Scottish Executive to give guarantees to the Parliament that the types of decreases in duty—the hype of lower duty—proposed by the chancellor will be delivered. When will the conditions kick in? We also welcome other initiatives that were included in the pre-budget statement, such as the simplification of the VAT regime for small businesses and a regeneration package.

The lengths to which the chancellor had to go to undo the damage of his financial statement to the House of Commons in March 2000 characterised the statement and gave it real shape. Members might call me old-fashioned but, when I was a lad, pre-budget reports were about outlining the economic conditions that provided the backdrop for the financial statement and budget report in March of each year. I did not expect much from the chancellor's pre-budget statement because he said that there should be no short-term fixes.

However, the chancellor gave us a reactionary, pre-election mini-budget, which, as the First Minister said, responded to the concerns of pensioners, motorists, hauliers, farmers and representatives of our fishing industries. That tells us that, however welcome the measures of the pre-budget statement in November may be, they were a direct response to the failure of the chancellor to get it right when he set out his budget report in March 2000.

No one pointed that out more clearly than Matthew Taylor, the member of Parliament for Truro and St Austell, who said to the House of Commons:

"Three years of cuts in public service are followed by a general election splurge to buy back the electorate."—*[Official Report, House of Commons, 8 November 2000; Vol 356, c 333.]*

I hope that that will be the tone of the Deputy First Minister when he sums up the debate tonight. If so, his tone will be enlivening. I hope that there will be some consistency between the arguments of the Liberal Democrats in Edinburgh and those of the Liberal Democrats in London.

The damage caused by the budget statement in March is clear and was additional to a lot of other damage, such as the 75p increase in the basic state pension, the 40 per cent cash-terms increase in the price of a litre of petrol and the fact that the Government stuck to the Conservatives' spending plans for its first two years in power. Those measures were never going to be popular, so the chancellor had a great deal from which to recover.

In this debate, the SNP will push for answers on how the Executive intends to respond to the climate created by and the issues raised in the pre-budget statement. Last week, I raised one of those issues, which lies at the heart of what the public expects of this Parliament. Will the Government respond positively and implement the final series of recommendations in the Sutherland report by paying for the personal care costs of our elderly in Scotland? It is all very well to be reassured by the fact that, at long last, after three years in office doing pitifully little to protect our pensioners, the chancellor is increasing the basic state pension by £5 a week. However, those self-same people may be exposed to paying personal care costs that are 17 times higher than that increase—a £5 increase in the state pension cannot compensate for a £85 weekly bill for the personal care costs of some elderly people. That does not seem to be a fair deal for our pensioners, and we want to know whether the Government will take action on that point.

We also want to know what dialogue the Scottish Executive had with HM Treasury in London about the formulation of the pre-budget report. What did the First Minister ask for? Did he ask for cuts in fuel duty? Did he ask for assistance for rural petrol stations? Did he ask for increases in the state pension? What initiatives of the pre-budget report were achieved as a result of the First Minister's interventions? I think that we need to know the nature of that dialogue to determine whether the First Minister had any effect in changing or influencing the direction taken by the chancellor.

My colleague, Mr Gibson, suggested that the opinion polls might have had an effect on the chancellor's decisions. He might say that, but I would not dare venture to suggest such a crude mechanism. Nevertheless, I would like to know whether the First Minister had any influence on the decisions that were arrived at by the chancellor. If we are supposed to accept that the framework of macro-economic policy and major social welfare policies are set by the Westminster Parliament, we must understand and be aware of the bargaining pitch and negotiating power of the First Minister.

We also need to know whether members of the Executive were singing from the same hymn sheet, if I may use that religious expression. We need to know whether Mr Wallace was arguing for the same things as Mr McLeish was, or whether Mr Wallace and the Liberal Democrat economy spokesperson in London were arguing from the same point of view. I do not know, but it would be interesting to know whether the Liberals were speaking with one voice.

The pre-budget report gives us the opportunity to consider some other major issues as they affect the Scottish economy. For example, it set out the fact that oil revenues are expected to be £5.3 billion this year and £7.3 billion next year. If we assume that an independent Scotland would collect 80 per cent of those revenues, that equates to an injection of £9 billion over a two-year period to the end of 2001. What impact of that revenue are we seeing in the Scottish economy while public finances are stewarded as they are at the moment?

The tax burden in the UK as a whole is rising, despite the fact that the basic rate of income tax is reduced. Tax revenues, as a percentage of gross domestic product, have risen from 35.2 per cent in 1996-97 to 36.9 per cent this year and they will peak next year at 37.5 per cent. That is from an honest Government that told us that it would cut our taxes. The Government cannot have it both ways. It cannot sustain those lines of argument while subjecting the public to rises in unfair, indirect taxes, of which fuel duty is just one perfect example.

Although we are paying more taxes, there has been no discernible improvement in the quality of our public services. The point of the SNP amendment is that Scottish public expenditure has fallen from 23.2 per cent of GDP when the Conservatives left office to 21.2 per cent this year. We are spending less of the nation's wealth on public services than at any time in the past 25 years. What a scandalous admission it is to say that even that bunch on the Tory benches could deliver more to public services than that combined bunch on the Labour and Liberal Democrat benches. What a sad reflection that is on the state

of our nation.

I see that the Presiding Officer is signalling to me to wind up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You still have two minutes.

Mr Swinney: In that case, I have plenty time to deliver the final part of my speech to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. What strikes me as the most important point about the pre-budget report is that it illustrates the condition and influence of our Parliament and the influence of the Executive. The Executive's motion refers to noting

"the implications of the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement for the Scottish Executive."

The chancellor's pre-budget statement may have implications for individual pensioners, because pensions are a reserved matter, and there may be implications too for motorists, hauliers, fishermen and farmers from the decisions that have been made on fuel duty, which is also a reserved matter.

What strikes me is that the pre-budget report has been a perfect illustration of the issues that the Scottish Parliament should normally and naturally be undertaking if we had the full powers to undertake all the major decisions that affect our society. We would then be having a debate about how we could excite and energise the Scottish economy by investing our oil wealth progressively and positively, rather than contributing it to the revenue flows and the war chest of the chancellor. If in this Parliament we had our own pre-budget report, setting out the macro-economic future and framework for Scotland, we could be talking about this Parliament taking bold and mature decisions about the future of the economy. Then we could really meet the ambitions of the people of Scotland by delivering the type of programme, the action and the change that they are hankering for.

Our amendment is essential, as it gets to the heart of the issues in this debate. This Parliament needs to take responsibility for all the issues of macro-economic policy. I would like to hear today whether the Executive supports that principled and positive stance, which would take this Parliament forward.

I move amendment S1M-1357.1, to insert at end:

"but regrets that at the end of the budget period the Chancellor will be investing less of the nation's wealth in public services than when the Conservative Party left office."

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I did not wish to interrupt the previous speaker, but will you indicate what action will be taken against John Swinney,

who during First Minister's question time indicated that information about people leaving the employment register was contained in a Scottish Parliament information centre document? He implied that the document was available to all members, but as far I can judge it is not generally available.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give Mr Swinney an opportunity to respond briefly, as I am not familiar with the facts in this case.

Mr Swinney: We asked SPICe to produce the information to which Dr Simpson refers. SPICe responded to that request, which is exactly what I told Parliament today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Richard Simpson will appreciate that I do not know the background to this matter. I will have inquiries made and report back to the chamber before the end of the debate.

I would like to explain the timings for the debate. When the First Minister sat down, only two names were showing on my screen, so I allowed Mr Swinney a significant overrun. I am therefore duty bound to allow Mr McLetchie and the Liberal spokesperson an extra two minutes each. If subsequent speeches are kept to about four minutes, just about every member who wishes to speak will have an opportunity to do so.

16:02

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): I trust that my speech will be a model of brevity and quality.

I listened with interest to the opening speeches by Mr Swinney and the First Minister. Mr Swinney's amendment pays a back-handed compliment to the previous Conservative Government, but we are happy to take praise from every quarter, however grudgingly or back-handedly it is delivered.

Undoubtedly the First Minister is indebted to his fellow Fifer Gordon Brown for the latter's assistance in securing for him his present position. In that context, the First Minister's lavish praise for the pre-budget report is understandable. However, if the Scottish Executive believes that the chancellor's statement will be the answer to its political prayers, it had better think again.

The truth is that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been found out. For the past three years, he has been systematically fleecing the British and Scottish taxpayers, as part of his stealth tax strategy, and he has now been caught redhanded. No one seriously believes that the chancellor would have made the concessions that he made in the pre-budget report on pensions and fuel, had he not been forced into them by the weight of public opinion and protest. The pre-budget report

confirms that since 1997 the tax burden in the United Kingdom has risen by some £25 billion, despite Mr Blair's promise at the last election not to increase taxes.

Gordon Brown has confirmed that he now plans to increase public spending faster than the trend rate of growth in the economy. If he ever gets the chance to implement his plans over the period for which they are contemplated, that can mean only higher taxes and higher borrowing in the years to come for taxpayers here and in the rest of the United Kingdom. Despite the Government's record of raising tax burdens over the past three years, we are now expected to be pathetically grateful to Gordon Brown for the fact that he has given us back some of our own money—money that he has hoarded as a result of over-taxing us in the first place.

In contrast to the chancellor's policies, the next Conservative Government will increase spending on improving public services, but within the economy's trend rate of growth. We will share the proceeds of economic growth between better public services and tax cuts for hard-working families, pensioners and businesses. That would restore the essential balance between tax and spending, which has been put out of kilter by Gordon Brown's stealth taxes on motorists, pensioners and families.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): David McLetchie mentioned tax cuts, but part of that equation is the suggestion that there will be public expenditure cuts. The estimate for my constituency of Paisley South is that those cuts would come to £24 million. Can he explain to my constituents where Tory cuts will fall in Paisley South?

David McLetchie: There will be no Tory cuts. There will be sustained improvements in public services. If Hugh Henry's constituents think that the fantasy spending programmes that have been devised by Gordon Brown will be delivered by a future Labour Government, they are living in a fantasy constituency. Those spending programmes are unsustainable because in the long term they are in excess of the trend rate of economic growth. They can be sustained only at the expense of a higher tax burden, more unemployment or higher borrowing, all of which will have undesirable consequences for Hugh Henry's constituents.

That is our approach to spending. There are aspects of the Government's approach that we welcome. We welcome the increases in the basic state pension that the chancellor announced. However, a Conservative Government will do better because under us the weekly pension will be higher. It will be higher because we will roll up the winter fuel payment, the Christmas bonus and

the free television licences for the over-75s and use that money, plus the millions saved on administering those schemes, to pay a higher rate of weekly pension.

Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Will Mr McLetchie give way?

David McLetchie: I will give way in a second.

Tax and benefit thresholds would also be adjusted to ensure that pensioners would not lose any of that additional money in higher taxes or benefit reductions.

Mr Kerr: If those allowances were rolled into the pension, that money would be taxed, so pensioners would not benefit from Mr McLetchie's proposal. They would lose on the £200 that they currently get from the chancellor because it would be taxed.

David McLetchie: If Mr Kerr had listened to the last words that I said before I accepted his intervention, he would have known that part of the policy is to increase the taxation and benefit thresholds so that the consequence that he fears will not occur.

The Labour Government patronises our pensioners with its gimmicks. Labour believes that older people should be told what to spend their money on. What is next? Food stamps, clothing vouchers and telephone tokens? It will not be long before Gordon Brown hands out ration books instead of pension books.

Pensioners do not want Labour's gimmicks. They want to be treated with dignity and respect and to be given in their hand the higher weekly income to which they are entitled. The truth is that pensioners cannot rely on Labour's short-term gimmicks; the previous Labour Government failed to pay the Christmas bonus in 1975 and 1976. Our policy gives extra money to all pensioners, including those living in residential and nursing homes, who do not benefit from Labour's gimmicks.

Andrew Wilson: Does Mr McLetchie agree with John McAllion's position, expressed at the Labour party conference, which is also that of Robert Brown of the Liberals and that of the SNP, that the link between average earnings and pensions should be restored to give pensioners the dignity to which he refers?

David McLetchie: No, I do not believe in the restoration of that link; neither does the Government. I believe that we must get rid of the gimmicks and give people the money in their hands so that they can judge their own household budget, run their own household economy and not have to follow the diktats of a nanny state, a Labour Government and a Labour chancellor.

The chancellor's stealth taxes on fuel have done enormous damage to Scotland's economy and nearly brought us to a standstill. The chancellor has refused to give the fuel tax cut for the whole country that people wanted. Instead, in typical new Labour fashion, he has announced a tax cut on a petrol that almost no one can buy. That is nothing new. It is a mythical tax cut because the Brown economic miracle is a myth. He is swimming against the international tide by imposing £5 billion of new business taxes, and a £5 billion-a-year burden of new regulations.

Our economy is growing at half the rate of the US economy and at a lower rate than those in euroland. Our productivity growth has been cut in half and the savings ratio is at its lowest point since 1963. The First Minister may be willing to believe all the Gordon Brown hype, but there is no economic miracle and people in Scotland are not so gullible.

16:10

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I welcome the debate on the chancellor's pre-budget report. Many of the announcements in that report were welcomed by the Liberal Democrats—indeed, they were Liberal Democrat policies that the chancellor chose to implement. Today's debate is on the consequential for the Scottish Parliament, which amount to £17 million extra for education. I shall concentrate on the way in which that money will be spent.

The money is extremely welcome and reaffirms our commitment to investing in education. I have a number of questions for the Deputy First Minister. First, when will the money be delivered to our schools, many of which are crying out for more investment? Secondly, how will the money be delivered: will it go directly to schools or via local authorities, as happened the previous time? Thirdly, will the money be ring-fenced or will individual schools and headmasters have some input in decisions on where the money is to be spent? Fourthly, is this money a one-off payment or is it part of the three-year spending announcements for local authorities that the Executive will make over the next month or two?

After the Scottish Executive's previous announcement of money being delivered directly to schools, the money was delivered through the local authorities to the schools. The announcement was welcomed by all the schools in my constituency. The sting in the tail was that the local authority decided to claw back some of the school budgets, with the effect that it was a status quo budget with no increase at all. I ask the minister to guarantee that the money will be given directly to schools and that it represents an increase on what the Executive planned to spend

over the coming year.

Another important aspect of the pre-budget statement, which has been much discussed over the past few months, is fuel duty. The fuel protesters in Edinburgh again brought the matter to the attention of the Parliament. I welcome much of what Gordon Brown had to say on fuel duty. In the debate in Parliament, four or five weeks ago, Liberal Democrat members laid out our policies on fuel. Many of those policies have now been announced as part of the chancellor's pre-budget statement.

Nevertheless, many motorists in the Highlands and Islands and in rural Scotland will believe that Gordon Brown has failed to deliver solutions to the problems that they face—especially those motorists in the Highlands and Islands whose fuel is up to 10p a litre dearer than that in the central belt. The opportunity to narrow that gap has been missed.

A recent study by EKOS demonstrates how the gap between fuel prices in the Highlands and Islands and in the central belt could be closed. That would involve a reduction not in the fuel price, but in the cost of fuel to the motorist. The solutions are contained in that document. If Gordon Brown had followed what is in that study, he would have reduced vehicle excise duty for motorists in the Highlands and Islands to £10 by using the postcode area as a mechanism for identifying those motorists. The EKOS report shows that, if that had been done, the reduction in VED would more than outweigh the current effects of the difference between fuel prices in the Highlands and Islands and those in the rest of Scotland. The total cost to the Exchequer of implementing that policy would be a miserly £5.35 million. As the total budget giveaway is £2 billion, the chancellor could surely have found an extra £5 million to close the gap right down between the cost of motoring in the Highlands and Islands and in the rest of Scotland.

I welcome the First Minister's commitment to rural Scotland and hope that, in his summing-up, the Deputy First Minister will agree that the Scottish Executive should continue to press the chancellor to implement this worthwhile and sensible solution that does away with the huge discrepancy between the central belt and the rest of the Highlands and Islands once and for all.

The chancellor constantly argues that there will be no repeat of the Tory years of boom and bust in economic policies. We should pay our respects to that policy statement. Its aim has been achieved; we have not experienced Tory boom and bust. However, when it comes to investing in our schools, hospitals, roads and railways, the policy seems to be the reverse; we have had three years of bust—and in the case of the railways, I really

mean "bust"—followed by boom, three years of famine followed by feast. If the Executive and Parliament had not followed the failed Tory policies of continually cutting investment in our public services—in our schools, hospitals, roads and trains—and indeed had sought the same stability in public service spending policies as in overall economic policy, we would not have found ourselves having to tackle the legacy of underinvestment and neglect in those services that was started by the Tories and continued by Labour in its first three years.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we go to open debate, members will remember the point of order raised by Richard Simpson and John Swinney's subsequent point of order about SPICe papers. I can now tell members that the research referred to was undertaken for an individual MSP. The general position is that SPICe requires that a member's permission be granted before the research can be released to anyone else. In this case, SPICe is still actively trying to contact the member.

16:17

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): The debate gives us a welcome opportunity to comment on the sound management of the economy. Indeed, it is heartening to hear words of praise—albeit sometimes grudging—from the Opposition parties. There is a recognition that things are moving forward.

However, Presiding Officer, I crave your indulgence to mention something that I had hoped to raise during First Minister's question time. As a result of the sound management of the economy, an ex gratia payment can be made to ex-prisoners of war, such as my father, who were held by the Japanese.

Dr Winnie Ewing: It is too late for many.

Hugh Henry: As Winnie Ewing said, it is too late for many. However, I am pleased that this Government has acted where previous Governments failed to do so. I hope that, if the First Minister is talking to the Prime Minister soon, he will express the anger felt by survivors that the money has come from the UK Government, not from the Japanese Government, and that there has been no apology.

Having craved the Presiding Officer's indulgence, I will now move on to the specifics of the debate. There has been substantial help for a broad range of my constituents in Paisley South. For example, 2,437 families are benefiting from a guaranteed income of at least £214 a week through the working families tax credit. Furthermore, families are also benefiting from substantial rises in child benefit.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland)

(SNP): I do not know whether Hugh Henry is aware of a difficulty with the working families tax credit. When people switch from their previous benefit to that benefit, they find that it is paid a month in arrears, which means that for a whole month they find themselves in difficult circumstances. I wonder whether the Executive could make representations on that issue to the UK Government.

Hugh Henry: I am aware of a number of anomalies in the benefits system. Indeed, my Westminster colleague Douglas Alexander has been pursuing that problem. I am sure that if Christine Grahame speaks to her local MP, he or she will be more than happy to pursue the issue as well.

In Paisley South, I am also witnessing some of the benefits of record investment in education. Unlike George Lyon, who has had some difficulty in his area, I welcome Renfrewshire Council's commitment to ensuring that the money allocated in the next round goes to direct improvements in schools. I look forward to the same happening again. I am aware that there is an aspiration for the money to be spent on repairs and equipment. I know that schools such as Bushes primary school in Glenburn, which has suffered vandalism problems, look forward to receiving money, albeit in small amounts, the spending of which is at their discretion. Langcraigs primary has already used money imaginatively. Last week, I was at Thorn primary in Johnstone to see what investment in education means to children in that community. I ask the Scottish Executive to encourage local councils to give more discretion to head teachers to spend budgets that will allow them to tackle some of the immediate issues that confront them in their schools.

Last but not least, the pre-budget statement brings substantial benefits for pensioners in my constituency, such as the pensioners from Glenburn who visited the Parliament recently, who will welcome the increase in the basic rate and the increase in the minimum income guarantee, and some of whom will benefit from the television licence. They will all benefit from the winter fuel allowance and will benefit generally from other Executive initiatives, such as the installation of central heating for people who do not have it.

All in all, we are beginning to see the signs—belatedly—of long-overdue and welcome progress. Both the chancellor and the Scottish Executive are to be congratulated on measures that will have a lasting impact on our communities.

16:21

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland)

(SNP): It is apposite that I follow Hugh Henry, because I think that things can only get better for Scotland's pensioners. I would call the recent announcement damage limitation, following the two-packets-of-crisps-a-week rise that pensioners received this year. Hugh Henry may think that what I am about to say is dreary, but the reality is that since new Labour came to power in 1997, Scotland's pensioners have seen no change in their poverty. I did not dig that up; the Liberal Democrat MP, Robert MacLennan, issued a press release which stated:

"The figures showed that a third of pensioners in Scotland are living in poverty, exactly the same figure for the period 1996-97 when the Labour Government came to power."

Mr MacLennan said:

"Labour has wasted valuable years in the battle against pensioner poverty."

I have no doubt that Mr MacLennan's colleagues in the chamber and Mr Wallace, in his summing-up, would want to support Mr MacLennan. Today, we do not start from fresh on pensioners; we started three and a half years ago.

Age Concern's statistics show that there are 70,000 Scottish pensioners living in severe poverty, many of whom have income that precludes them from the national minimum income guarantee. I will return to the problems of benefits and the minimum income guarantee shortly.

With a rise of 73p or even £5 a week, pensioners still face the real world, in which heating bills and water charges are rising. Pensioner may get free eye tests, but they pay for their glasses, which cost a lot. There is no doubt that the nearly 1 million pensioners in Scotland—all of them voters and those most likely to vote—the pensioners' forums and their representatives, Age Concern and Help the Aged, pushed London into a partial U-turn on pensions. However, it is only partial, because the essential link between pensions and average earnings has not and will not be restored. The link was introduced by the feisty Barbara Castle—who still fights for its restoration—and abandoned by the Tories and now new Labour has adopted the Tories' clothing, as it has with so many policies. We do not want bits and pieces and neither do Scotland's pensioners. We want a decent basic state pension, linked to the nation's profits and wealth through earnings.

In the 1970s, the average pensioner income was 25 per cent of average earnings. Today, the gap between earnings and pensioner income has grown and that income now stands at 17 per cent of average earnings. We are witnessing the

deliberate demise of the universal state pension. Incidentally, if the link between earnings and pensions had not been broken, a single pensioner would have had an additional £29.95 a week and a couple would have had £47.90. That puts the £5 rise, next year's £8 rise and the following year's £3 rise into context.

Something else puts those rises into context: the cost of a residential place in the Scottish Borders is £265 a week, the cost of a nursing home place is £355 a week, and the cost to the pensioner is the sale of their home. Yet the Executive dithers and swithers over the funding of personal care. I am proceeding with my member's bill and meeting the non-Executive drafting committee next week. I held off doing so because I thought that the Executive was going to deliver, but I do not think that it will.

I refer the Executive to its equality strategy document, which says that it is

"taking steps to make real improvements to the lives of older people, working in partnership to improve take-up of income and benefits".

That is not what Scotland's pensioners want. They do not want to go out with a begging bowl for benefits. Currently, two out of 10 pensioners are obliged to fill out a 42-page form listing their income and savings before they can receive benefits. It is forecast that six out of 10 pensioners will face means testing in the next three years. An article in today's *Daily Mail* refers to independent examination by the House of Commons library that has unearthed that statistic. Incidentally, 33 per cent of pensioners who are entitled to take up the minimum income guarantee do not do so. There are a variety of reasons for that, among which is pride. The minimum income guarantee is no guarantee to 33 per cent of pensioners. I should point out that 17 per cent of the funding for a benefit system goes on the administration.

I say this to the pensioners: there are some touchstones that would be put right in an independent Scotland. The Executive cannot deliver equality, dignity, independence or choice. An independent Scotland would. It would deliver personal care free and would deliver a decent basic state pension that was linked to earnings.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): I must indicate to members that speeches are slipping over the four-minute time limit. As we have more members than we have time for, I ask members to keep their speeches as short as possible.

16:27

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): Today, we heard the First Minister trying to defend the chancellor's failure to use a golden

opportunity to stimulate Scotland's economy. At the base of everything that everyone has talked about—everyone has been talking around it, but no one has said it out loud—is the fact that we need to stimulate wealth creation in Scotland. From that, we get the taxation income that we need to run our public services—it must come first. When Henry McLeish was Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, he talked regularly about Labour's vision for an enterprise economy in Scotland. Unfortunately, all he did was talk about it. Gordon Brown has followed the same lame game: empty words and spin with little positive action. Tinkering with VAT does not remove the burden of bureaucracy on business in Scotland. There was absolutely no mention of that in any of the stuff that came up from Westminster.

People have talked at length about our pensioners. It is true to say that new Labour has treated them shabbily. Instead of treating those people with the respect that they deserve and raising the basic rate of tax relief so that they can keep more money and choose how they spend it, Labour introduces complicated gimmicks and soundbites of no substance.

Mr McLeish knew of the Scottish Conservatives' plans in advance and, in spite of his proclaimed largesse, he has not come near to them. Just because the First Minister has been taken in by the string of minor changes, he should not assume that the people will be. Does the Executive realise that merely freezing fuel taxation is of little comfort to rural Scotland and its businesses and commuters? When will the Government accept that goods must be delivered and that there is little alternative but to use the roads? What happened to the slogan, "No gain without pain"? In Scotland, all we get from Labour is pain. We should be grateful that the Liberal Democrats have no influence on policy, or we would be looking at an 8 per cent a year real-terms increase in fuel duty.

Low-sulphur petrol has been a well-kept secret. The secret has been kept so well that, when I met Brian Wilson at the BBC last week, he told me that that was the first time that he had heard about it. I wonder whether we have joined-up government after all.

Four years on and Labour still does not spend as much on the public services as the Conservatives did. The only thing that Labour increases is taxation, and it does so in a multitude of ways. But for what? To build a fund to buy an election result. People have already talked about the huge hikes in taxation, which will be 37.5 per cent of gross domestic product next year.

The First Minister struggled to be credible today, but he is in good company. He has his loyal ally Sonny Jim and the Liberal lackeys to back him, although there are not many of them here today—

they must be a little embarrassed about the statement. I feel sorry for Mr Wallace because he is being forced to endorse the Brown budget in his winding-up speech. Before he speaks, he will perhaps consider the fact that in supporting Labour today he is publicly endorsing what we already know: a vote for the Liberals is a wasted vote, as it is only a vote for Labour.

Instead of reading out his new Labour script, Mr Wallace should tell us why so many of his actions in Scotland are at odds with Liberal policy in the rest of the UK. Does he recognise the following words?

"The Chancellor's Labour predecessors introduced mini-Budgets in times of financial crisis precisely because of boom and bust, whereas"

Gordon Brown

"introduces them at times of political crisis to bring in policies of bust and boom. Three years of cuts in public service are followed by a general election splurge to buy back the electorate . . . For all the real pension increases that he announced today, which we welcome, he will leave millions of pensioners to the indignity of means tests."—*[Official Report, House of Commons, 8 November 2000; Vol 356, c 333.]*

They were said by Matthew Taylor, the Liberal Democrat shadow chancellor. Will Mr Wallace tell us whether Mr Kennedy gave him permission to be here today to be the biggest toady to the Labour party that we have seen? I find it impossible to understand how a Liberal party that made so many promises to Scotland before the election can now just walk away.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Will the member remind us which party broke the link between pensions and earnings? Could he remind us what the Conservatives did on the 75p increases? Did they support that or did they abstain?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please come to a close on the point.

Mr Davidson: I ask Mr Rumbles in return what the Liberal party's position is on the link between pensions and earnings, given that the Executive does not support it. He asked the question; he should answer it himself.

In conclusion, what we should talk about today is the lack of incentive for businesses to increase their productivity and to increase investment in new technology, plant, equipment and premises so that they create a competitive business sector, which will provide the sustainable jobs that Scotland needs. We live in an ever more competitive world. Why did the chancellor not go further when he stated that he would not treat the oil industry as a cash cow by opting for a windfall tax this year?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please come to

a close.

Mr Davidson: Why did the chancellor not state clearly that he would not consider it again for a fixed period? That would have given a much-needed period of fiscal stability to encourage further investment in the North sea.

Our public services are at breaking point, yet we still do not receive the support for them that we have offered but the chancellor has not. Scotland badly needs to have confidence in its future funding, especially as councils have to bid ahead for their tax statements. Once again, to use the First Minister's own words, it shows a lack of ambition to deliver for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will not be able to call all the members who wish to speak because of the length of time that members who do speak are taking.

16:33

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): On Monday, I addressed a conference in my constituency on fuel poverty and sustainability, organised by the excellent local energy efficiency agency SCARF. There were perhaps 100 people at the conference. The fuel poverty that they are concerned with is not to do with the price of diesel or the level of road tax on a truck, important though those issues are; their concern is the hundreds of thousands of Scottish households who cannot afford to heat their homes to a decent level of comfort or who have to pay out more than 10 per cent of their disposable income in order to do so.

Many of those households are pensioner households. Their concerns need to be addressed in two ways: by improving the energy efficiency of their homes and by increasing the cash incomes at their disposal. Gordon Brown's autumn statement was good news on both counts. First, it gave increases in real terms in pensioner incomes, targeting in particular those on lower and middle incomes and adding £50 to the winter fuel allowance. Secondly, it offered continuing support for energy efficiency initiatives to cut the cost of heating homes.

Thanks to Gordon Brown's sound economic management, there is a Scottish Executive programme to secure investment of £350 million over five years to ensure a central heating system in every pensioner's house and every council house in Scotland. He has had other things to say about fuel and energy costs. I welcome measures such as the reduction in the cost of ultra-low-sulphur petrol and diesel. Unlike the pessimists in the Opposition, I look forward to a rapid reaction from the oil industry to ensure that those fuels are made available on every forecourt in Scotland by

the time of the spring budget.

I want to give a particular welcome to the chancellor's decision not to impose a windfall tax on the production of North sea oil. Although some seem to think so, oil revenues do not grow on trees—

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): While the member applauds the chancellor for saying that he will not impose a windfall tax, will he say whether there should be a greater tax on the profits that have already been made?

Lewis Macdonald: The issue that we have to face, which the chancellor has faced fairly and squarely, is not the past 20 years but how we sustain the oil industry for the next 20 years. Gordon Brown is right to focus on that. When Brent crude sold at only \$11 a barrel a year ago, hundreds of Scottish jobs were lost and thousands were put at risk. It is now selling at \$33 a barrel and there are oil industry investment plans worth billions to the Scottish economy. The chancellor was right. The autumn statement told the oil companies—just as he told the fuel protestors—that what goes up on the global oil market can come down just as quickly. Fiscal plans must be based on that recognition. The job of prudent government is to provide the fiscal stability to secure the future of our oil industry and to secure industry investment in competition with other oil provinces all over the world—

Ms MacDonald rose—

Lewis Macdonald: No, thank you.

Scotland cannot live by oil alone. I welcome the chancellor's and the Executive's clear commitment to the development of renewable energy. Robert Gordon University in my constituency and many of the oil and oil-related companies based in Aberdeen are desperate to invest their offshore expertise and skills in putting Scotland at the forefront of wave-power technology. On the day the first commercial wave-power generation venture gets under way on Islay, I ask the Executive and the Westminster Government to work together to ensure that the national grid is strengthened to carry power generated by wind and wave from every part of Scotland—not just from the central belt, but from the north, the north-east, Aberdeen and the Highlands and Islands, so that all those areas can play a full part in the next generation of energy industries in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call Iain Smith, but I must ask him to keep his remarks as brief as possible.

16:37

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): I will do my best. I am delighted that so many Opposition

members are so taken with what Matthew Taylor MP said in response to Gordon Brown's statement and seem to support it as much as we Liberal Democrats do. I assure them that we support his statement and do not support the actions that Gordon Brown has taken since 1997; we believe that there have been wasted opportunities—three wasted years for our pensioners, schools and hospitals—because of underinvestment by Labour at Westminster.

Andrew Wilson: Does the member appreciate that if he is critical of the chancellor for not spending as much on education as the Conservatives did, he is also criticising the coalition Government, which is doing exactly the same?

Iain Smith: That is absolute nonsense. The Scottish Executive is increasing spending on education and health; those are our priorities and that is what we have done since we came to power in 1999. I am talking about the record since 1997, not since 1999. Perhaps it is time that the SNP understood that difference.

We welcome the new money for pensioners that Gordon Brown announced. It does not go as far as the Liberal Democrats would like: in addition to the £5, we would like an additional £5 for all pensioners, £10 for those over 75 and £15 for those over 80, because it is in the older age groups that pensioners experience most poverty. We would like extra on the basic pension rather than reliance on means testing. I remind the Conservatives that their party did not oppose the 75p increase in pensions when the Liberal Democrats led the opposition to that change earlier this year.

Mr Davidson rose—

Iain Smith: I do not have time to give way; I have been asked to be brief. If we add up the Tory proposals and take away the benefits that the Tories would cut, the result comes to a miserly 42p a week extra for pensioners.

I would like to issue a couple of challenges to Andrew Wilson, who I presume will wind up for the SNP. John Swinney spoke about oil-rich Scotland. In the *Edinburgh Evening News* yesterday, Andrew Wilson commented on the Chantrey Vellacott report into oil revenues. He said:

"This is game, set and match to the economic case for independence. It leaves the SNP's unionist opponents in disarray. It is a heavyweight analysis".

He said exactly the same on 15 March 2000, using exactly the same words—"game, set and match". He used exactly the same words on 15 February 2000—"game, set and match" and "a heavyweight analysis". Of course, he did not say that when the same group of economists at Chantrey Vellacott said in 1998, when oil prices

were down to \$10 a barrel, that there would be a huge deficit in Scotland. He described that as “economic gibberish”. Apparently, when an opinion does not support the SNP’s case it is “economic gibberish” and when it does it is “a heavyweight analysis”. The analysis is the same; only the price of oil has changed. Will the SNP accept that if we were extremely oil dependent, our economy would be volatile and, for every dollar per barrel the price of oil went down, our economy would suffer with the equivalent of 2p on income tax? That is the reality of the figures.

Ms MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Iain Smith: I am sorry, but I do not have time. I am already running late and I have another point to make.

The SNP seems to be obsessed with public spending equalling gross domestic product. In reality, in a recession, if public spending equals GDP, spending has to be cut significantly. There was a recession between 1992 and 1997 under the Conservatives. If the SNP’s proposals had been implemented at that time, public spending would have been cut. We do not believe in such policies; we believe that investment is necessary in health and education and that that should not be linked entirely to GDP.

I would like Andrew Wilson to explain the SNP’s policy on fuel duties. The SNP believes that this Parliament should have responsibility for fuel and vehicle excise duties. Does that mean that if the SNP did as it intends to do and cut fuel prices to the European average, it would have to find £400 million from the Scottish block to fund that cut? How would it do that? Would it increase personal taxation? Would it cut services? The SNP owes the people of Scotland an explanation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move now to the closing speeches. I apologise to members who wanted to speak but were not called.

16:42

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I too would like to welcome warmly the chancellor’s pre-budget report. That sentiment would be echoed by the majority of hard-working Scots. Pensioners throughout Scotland, including the 13,500 in Kirkcaldy, will especially welcome the package. The report clearly illustrates a Government that is focused on attacking the ills of pensioner poverty, ensuring that all pensioners share in the rising prosperity of the nation.

The multifaceted approach of the minimum income guarantee, the pensions credit and the winter fuel payments, coupled with the significant increase in the basic state pension, demonstrates how more resources and targeted spending can

be combined to ensure that those who need the most help get it.

Christine Grahame: Does the member agree that the loud message from pensioners’ forums is that they want the link between pensions and average earnings to be restored?

Marilyn Livingstone: Under our policy, £2 billion more will be spent over a four-year period than would have been spent if that link had been restored.

The increases in the minimum income guarantee mean that, by 2001, no pensioner will be living on less than £100 a week. The pensions credit is a pioneering and progressive scheme to reward pensioners who have planned for their future and who have modest savings for which they have worked hard throughout their lives.

I welcome the increase in the winter fuel allowance and I commend the Executive on its innovative proposals for central heating for all pensioners and for concessionary travel. We must promote social justice for everyone in our society and prioritise resources to ensure the eradication of poverty. That is what our policy does.

Our policy will see additional spending and an approach of progressive pragmatism—it will not see separation at all costs or tax cuts at the expense of public investment. Pensioners need a Government that is committed to an all-embracing agenda of social justice and fairness. That is what this budget and this Executive are delivering.

Pensioners are by no means alone in gaining substantial benefits from last Wednesday’s announcement. The pre-budget report delivers a welcome package for Scotland’s motorists, worth an equivalent of a cut of 8p per litre. Benefits to the motorist have been combined with a reaffirmation of our commitment to the environment. Short-termism—an all-too-common policy disease in the past—must never again block a long-term approach to the goals of a stable, dynamic and sustainable economy and employment for all. Investment today equals new opportunities for all in the future. The philosophy of opening up the potential of everyone in society underpins the statement made by the chancellor last week.

The proposals give more money directly to schools. I welcome that on behalf of my constituents and I am sure that all members welcome the extra funding for education—a 17 per cent increase.

Proposals to raise the children’s tax credit to £10 per week will benefit many working families in Scotland. I also welcome the £1 billion package for deprived areas.

All those measures can be implemented only

through a stable economic framework. We have delivered that. We have the lowest unemployment in 20 years. In the past three years, unemployment in Kirkcaldy has decreased by 16 per cent. We have achieved the highest sustained period of investment in our schools, hospitals and pensioners. We have achieved sound public finances, from a black hole of £28 billion of debt. All that would be destroyed by independence. For the SNP, two plus two really does equal five: 1p can rebuild a nation. That is fiction, not fact.

The only guarantees that the Tories have offered us are £16 billion of cuts—that is £24 million of cuts in vital public services in my constituency and others throughout Scotland. Will the Tories tell the people of Scotland the truth about their pension plans? Tory policies would leave millions to sink, allowing a select few to swim.

The pre-budget report sets out the fundamental choices facing Scotland in today's global economy. We have stability, growth, jobs, low inflation, record levels of investment and an expansive vision of a socially just and inclusive Scotland. The report builds on Scotland's economic stability in the UK and will deliver long-term prosperity for everyone. Labour's vision is clear. It is a vision of growth, jobs and security. That is how Scotland will achieve opportunity for all.

16:47

Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

Members will forgive me if I rise with less than unbridled enthusiasm for the Executive's paean—an unashamed hymn of praise to a pre-budget statement that was reactive rather than measured and political rather than principled.

There were some measures that we welcomed, particularly the simplification of VAT for small businesses, the incentives for research and development, tax relief for share capital and the limited help for the haulage industry. There were others that I was going to mention later on, but I have been told to keep my speech short.

The First Minister should have been gracious enough to acknowledge the debt owed to Kenneth Clarke for the golden economic legacy that he left the Government—but the First Minister is not noted for graciousness. The Executive is more to be pitied than laughed at. It should be pitied for its pathetic attempt to pull the wool over the eyes of Scotland.

The First Minister made a statement more notable for its omissions than for its content. Instead of acknowledging the difficulties for businesses faced by the highest fuel costs in Europe, the First Minister acts as an apologist for

a chancellor who had to perform more flips than a performing seal when he was dragged kicking and screaming to offer concessions for motorists. According to *The Sunday Times*, those concessions will never be passed on: they apply to a fuel that is available to only 5 per cent of Scottish motorists. I hope that the Deputy First Minister will assure us that, by April, 100 per cent of motorists will have access to low-sulphur fuel.

Let us not forget that it was the chancellor who caused the problem by upping fuel tax by 3.4 per cent and upping pensions by a miserly 1.1 per cent. The Labour party promised the end of means testing, but it is subjecting our old-age pensioners to the indignity of increased means testing. The Labour party has increased the tax burden from 35.2 per cent at the general election in 1997 to 37.8 per cent today. It was the chancellor who filched £25 billion from the pockets of the British people.

John Swinney's speech was uncharacteristic—he does not often show such a lack of economic skill. What would happen to the rate of inflation in Scotland if £9 billion was poured into the Scottish economy? Having said that, I thank John Swinney for his kind words to the Conservatives earlier in the debate.

Let us not forget the other omissions, not just from the First Minister, but from the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his statement to the House of Commons. Where was the mention of the rise in national insurance, that tax on work, which will see modest earners in Scotland paying another £200 per year? Where was the mention of the extra burden on married couples, with the switch from the married persons tax allowance to the child tax credit?

On the business front, Labour plays a dangerous game with its spending and tax plans, which jeopardise growth and business stability and erode Scotland's competitive advantage. Already, we have seen our economy growing at half the rate of that of the United States of America, productivity growing at half the rate at which it grew during the previous UK Parliament and the UK share of exports falling.

As the First Minister crows atop his midden of self-congratulation, let him consider what David McLetchie said about personal freedom and remember the words of Enoch Powell—we all remember Enoch Powell—who said that whenever the state had taken economic decisions away from the citizen, it had deprived them of other liberties as well.

Presiding Officer, I am proud that I have kept within my allotted time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A unique distinction, Mr Johnston.

16:51

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am glad that we have had this debate, although it would appear from the number of Labour members who have attended throughout that they are not. Only one in 10 Labour MSPs has bothered to show up for this debate, which was led by their own First Minister. That shows his lack of support in his party—

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member give way?

Andrew Wilson: I would be delighted to. I am barely into my speech, but if Lewis Macdonald has something good to say, let us hear it.

Lewis Macdonald: Will Andrew Wilson acknowledge that at one point his party managed to muster only three members in the chamber, which is fewer than any other party at any point during the debate?

Andrew Wilson: That is a good topic, but the debate was led by the First Minister—*[Interruption.]* The Liberal Democrats can rest; at least they turned up. The debate was led by the First Minister. Today's attendance has shown the confidence that his own back benchers place in him.

As John Swinney and other colleagues have said, there are many measures in the pre-budget statement—on pensions, particularly the winter fuel allowance, and the minimum income guarantee—that we welcome. However, it is clear, as Christine Grahame said, that much of the pre-budget statement undoes the damage of previous Gordon Brown budgets—such as the last one, in which he gave a paltry rise in pensions, made a damaging increase in fuel tax and made a needless cut in income tax.

I hope that, in his summation, Jim Wallace will answer John Swinney's points, particularly those about the coverage of low-sulphur fuel and the assurances the Executive can give on what will happen should it not be the expected 100 per cent. What will happen if such coverage does not occur until after the election? We have the promise that it will come before then.

A key point about pensions, which Christine Grahame alluded to, needs to be discussed: the end of universality for the state pension. We see it withering on the vine. She made the point well that the average income of a pensioner was 25 per cent of average earnings in the 1970s but is now only 17 per cent—so for every pound earned by someone on average earnings, a pensioner has barely 17p. That is Scotland's shame, which this pre-budget statement has not reversed or addressed in any detail. Personal care is a key issue that the Executive can address. Rather than lauding the chancellor, let us look at what the

Executive can do to redress some of the issues.

I hope that, in his summation, Jim Wallace will also answer John Swinney's question about what, specifically, the Executive asked for in the pre-budget discussions—if it had any—with Gordon Brown. What specifically did the Executive ask for? What did it get? What did it lose? Did the First Minister ask for the rise in indirect taxation that we have seen? Did the Liberal Democrats ask for the fall in the proportion of national wealth that is spent on public services, which will go on not just through this Parliament in Westminster, but until the end of the spending period?

I was bemused when Iain Smith welcomed Matthew Taylor's comments, because what Matthew Taylor referred to is happening in Scotland as well. Less is being invested in public services as a share of the national wealth than was invested even under the Conservatives, which is why we lodged our amendment. I hope that members who are of free mind will support it.

There are many measures in this pre-budget statement that are to be welcomed, but there are also a number that have to be criticised, and it is our job to do so. Scotland is now the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom. We have seen unfair taxes and the overall tax burden rise under Labour. The highest-taxed businesses in the United Kingdom are in Scotland. The highest-taxed council tax payers are in Scotland. We have been spending less of the nation's wealth on public services than at any point under the Conservatives, with health and education spending rising more slowly in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. We in the Parliament can do little about that, because we do not have the power to put Scotland's wealth to work in Scotland's interests.

If we trusted the Scots with the normal powers of a normal independent country rather than with the partial powers that we have at present, the situation would be different. Perhaps we would look after the pensioners every year, and not just in a pre-election year. Maybe people would begin to trust chancellors and Governments when their money was taken in tax and they asked for it to be spent on matters that they cared about.

We should think about Scotland's benefits and consider North sea oil to be a bounty, rather than an inflationary threat, which Mr Johnston called it. At present, I would love to have an inflationary threat to the Scottish economy. The long-term investment work to which Norway has put its oil wealth shows what can be done. We can welcome the work of London accountants when they deal with the Government's analysis, which has been criticised before. On the basis of the Government's shoddy analysis, Scotland is sending more in tax to London this year than it is receiving in public

spending.

Mr Rumbles *rose*—

Iain Smith *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Wilson is winding up.

Andrew Wilson: We are in surplus more years than the UK Government has been in the past 25 years. It is the Government at Westminster that has a problem with deficits, not the Scottish Government. We should aim to invest that money for the long term. With the normal powers of a normal country, that would be possible. At present, we must instead take second best from Westminster.

16:56

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): Several themes have emerged from the debate. Most parties have welcomed the increase in pensions, although the Conservatives were more grudging and thought that they could do better. They want to take away the winter fuel allowance, concessionary TV licences and the Christmas bonus. Our calculations show that with those measures removed, the Conservatives' plans add up to a 42p increase for pensioners. The Conservative party's sums do not add up and, as a tax-cutting party, it cannot prove that it could afford its plans.

David McLetchie says that the chancellor is giving pensioners gimmicks that they do not want. I do not know whether he has ever been on the doorsteps and heard from pensioners who want help with their fuel bills or who want concessionary TV licences. By supporting the Conservative position with a quotation from Enoch Powell, Nick Johnston showed how out of touch the Conservatives are with what pensioners want.

The Executive has ensured that our pensioners get a better deal. Hugh Henry, Lewis Macdonald and Marilyn Livingstone made it clear that £350 million will be invested in central heating for our pensioners. Pensioners will also have free concessionary travel.

Tommy Sheridan: The minister is probably aware that we have taken back £641 million in capital consents during the past three years. That is nearly double the £350 million that will be invested in central heating. I asked the First Minister about that earlier in the debate. Does the Deputy First Minister support a change to the capital receipts clawback rule?

Mr Wallace: As the First Minister said, more fundamental action will be taken to address that issue. If I have time, I will describe what is being done about regeneration in urban areas to try to

meet some of the concerns that Mr Sheridan has raised.

John Swinney and Christine Grahame mentioned the problem, with the minimum income guarantee, of form filling. I have a lot of sympathy with that point, but I hope that Christine Grahame was not suggesting that the Executive is wrong to encourage the take-up of entitlement when it exists. It would be perverse if, just for the sake of making a political point, she said that she did not expect pensioners to take it up.

Christine Grahame: When the Deputy First Minister is on those doorsteps, are pensioners not telling him—as they are telling me and all their organisations—that they want the link with earnings to be restored and that they do not want the indignity of applying for benefits?

Mr Wallace: The increases of £5, £10 and £15 that my party proposed are the increases that the chancellor has delivered. That does more, in this parliamentary term, than restore the link with earnings.

I am sure that Matthew Taylor will be delighted at the copious references to his speech that the Conservatives have made. Unlike most Scottish National Party MPs, I was in Westminster to hear what he said. He and I were singing from the same hymn sheet when we asked for a freeze on fuel duty and the extension of measures on vehicle excise duty—the very things that the chancellor delivered. Matthew Taylor and I, along with other Liberal Democrats, voted regularly against the fuel tax increases that the Tories imposed—and indeed the ones that were imposed in the first two years of the present Government.

Mr Davidson: Will Mr Wallace give way?

Mr Wallace: We heard Mr Davidson speak earlier—it was like a worn record stuck in the groove. I do not think that we want to hear it again.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr Wallace: I will come back to fuel duty—Mr MacAskill might get a chance then.

I will concentrate on two or three issues that have featured in the debate: the all-important education sector, rural issues and, if time permits, the regeneration of deprived communities.

George Lyon asked about the £17.2 million of consequential that the Executive will receive from the pre-budget report. As Henry McLeish indicated, Jack McConnell will make a full statement on that issue next week, but I can say that the money will be channelled through local authorities. The resources must be seen to be in addition to existing planned education spending and spending on individual schools. As George Lyon knows, when we entered the partnership

agreement we urged for more money to be spent on books and equipment and stressed the importance of dealing with the backlog of maintenance and repairs in schools. We identify the £17.2 million as going a long way towards addressing those issues.

We all welcomed the First Minister's statement of the Executive's commitment to rural Scotland and, not least, to the Highlands and Islands. From my own constituency experience, I can testify to petrol prices that are more than 90p a litre. That is why we made representations to the chancellor on the high cost of fuel both generally and specifically in the Highlands and Islands. We will continue to press specific points on that issue, such as the extension of the current small lorry vehicle excise duty scheme to islands that are not currently eligible.

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Mr Wallace: I will take Mr MacAskill's intervention.

Mr MacAskill: This week, members of the SNP and of the minister's party met members of the Peoples Fuel Lobby. Were they a mob? If not, why were those same people, many of whom demonstrated five weeks ago, called a mob by the minister at that time? Will he now withdraw that scandalous remark?

Mr Wallace: There was a peaceful and responsible demonstration this week. From what we sometimes hear from the SNP benches, I think that we all know a mob when we see one. *[Laughter.]*

Members have referred to the 3p reduction in the fuel duty on ultra-low-sulphur petrol. It is important to recognise that the chancellor indicated that that reduction would be conditional on nationwide availability. It is crucial that all areas of the United Kingdom, including the most remote rural areas, are able to benefit from that initiative and I confirm that the Executive will monitor the development of the scheme to ensure that it takes place.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the minister give way?

Mr Swinney: Will the minister give way?

Mr Wallace: I will give way to Mr Stone.

Members: Aw.

Mr Stone: That shows the advantage of being a Liberal Democrat in the Scottish Parliament.

I, too, welcome Mr McLeish's commitment to working hard for the Highlands and Islands, which is good news indeed up where I come from. As the Deputy First Minister knows, visitor figures have been catastrophic. Will he give an undertaking that

those difficulties will be high up the Executive's agenda when it funnels through the money?

Mr Wallace: During the past week, it has been made clear that the promotion of tourism in Scotland is a high priority for the Executive. Indeed, I understand that the leader of the Conservative party visited Glasgow today—we are always willing to welcome the casual passing tourist.

I will address briefly the issue of regeneration, which Mr Sheridan raised. The package includes stamp duty relief for the most deprived areas, accelerated tax relief for cleaning up contaminated land and VAT measures to reduce the cost of property conversions and of creating flats from under-used space above shops. In relation to the stamp duty exemption, the Treasury recognises that the Scottish Executive is responsible for identifying deprived areas in Scotland and we intend to get together with ministers from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to work out how stamp duty relief will work in practice. We will seek to ensure that Scotland's disadvantaged areas fully share in the benefits provided by these measures.

Despite increasing oil prices, the prospects for Scottish business remain positive. Scottish GDP growth picked up in the second quarter, year-on-year growth is broadly in line with the long-term trend and business survey results are positive. By historical standards, unemployment is low and employment is high and rising. The Executive wants to build on that, not least to ensure that we can deliver public services in a way that enables the people of Scotland to benefit from the additional resources that are being put into health, education and public transport by the Executive. There is much to which we can look forward in the years to come.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:05

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Tom McCabe to move the four motions that are set out in the business bulletin: S1M-1351, S1M-1352, S1M-1353 and S1M-1354.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following designation of Lead Committee—

The Transport and the Environment Committee to consider the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2000.

That the Parliament agrees that the following Orders be approved:

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (No.4) (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/359) and

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (East Coast) (Scotland) Order (SSI 2000/360) and

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (East Coast) (No.2) (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/370) and

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Notification of Authorisations etc.) (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/340).

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk will be closed on 27, 28 and 29 December 2000.

That the Parliament agrees the following dates under Rule 2.3.1: 19–23 February 2001 inclusive, 9–20 April 2001 inclusive, 2 July–31 August 2001 inclusive, 8–19 October 2001 inclusive and 24 December 2001–4 January 2002 inclusive.—[Mr McCabe.]

The Presiding Officer: Those motions having been moved, we now move to decision time.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I want to speak on the last of those Parliamentary Bureau motions, Presiding Officer. It was not clear to me whether Mr McCabe was moving all four motions simultaneously.

The Presiding Officer: Yes, he was. You were a little slow to press your request-to-speak button, Mr Gorrie, but I shall allow you to comment nevertheless.

Donald Gorrie: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I feel that it is a mistake for us to reduce the number of sitting days of the Parliament, which is what motion S1M-1354 proposes. It is not a question of MSPs being idle; I am sure that all MSPs work extremely hard. It is a question of getting through the parliamentary business,

especially the committee business. Reducing sitting time by one week or two weeks, depending on how one calculates it, is a step in the wrong direction and I suggest that we reconvene a week earlier in August than the motion suggests. I am not sure whether I am permitted to move an amendment, or whether I must merely vote against the motion.

The Presiding Officer: You cannot move an amendment, I am afraid, Mr Gorrie. Do you want to reply to that point, Mr McCabe?

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): I should point out that motion S1M-1354 has all-party support and received such support in the Parliamentary Bureau. We are discussing a list of non-chamber days throughout the next calendar year. In drawing up those days, the bureau reflected on the principles that were set out in the consultative steering group report with regard to how the Parliament conducts its business. We also reflected on our experience of parliamentary work so far.

I acknowledge Mr Gorrie's point about the committees of the Parliament. I stress that, during those non-chamber days, committees of the Parliament can meet, as they have done in the past and will do again during the course of the year. Committees of the Parliament can use that time to undertake visits, within Scotland and to other locations. Other parliamentary organisations also use that time to undertake visits that are difficult to fit in when the chamber is sitting.

Perhaps most important of all, during the times that have been allocated as non-sitting days in the chamber, members have an opportunity to reconnect with their constituencies, to meet groups and individuals, and to do the important work that is more difficult to do during the times when the Parliament usually meets. For those reasons, and based on our experience so far, I strongly recommend the motion to the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: We shall come to a vote on that motion in a moment.

Decision Time

17:08

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are 12 questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-1356.1, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1356, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on community care, 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)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (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)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 56, Against 26, Abstentions 18.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S1M-1356.2, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1356, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on community care, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 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)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 43, Against 56, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S1M-1356, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on community care, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 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)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gallie, Phil (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)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (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)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)

Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes that the Health and Community Care Committee is conducting an inquiry into Community Care and believes it is appropriate that the Parliament awaits the outcome of the Committee's conclusions.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): On a point of order. When the first amendment to a motion is agreed, is not it normal practice for the second amendment not to be called?

The Presiding Officer: In this case, the wording of the two amendments was not inconsistent. In the case of the amendments that we are about to vote on, it is. Each set of amendments has to be dealt with separately.

The fourth question is, that amendment S1M-1355.3, in the name of Margaret Curran, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1355, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on housing stock transfer, 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)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (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)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 55, Against 28, Abstentions 18.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Because amendment S1M-1355.3 has been agreed to, amendment S1M-1355.1, in the name of Bill Aitken, falls.

The sixth question is, that motion S1M-1355, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on housing stock transfer, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 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)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gallie, Phil (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)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (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)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 73, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament supports the community ownership

policies that the Scottish Executive is taking forward to attract significant new investment into housing and supports putting tenants at the heart of the decision making process relating to their homes, in line with its commitments in *Partnership for Scotland* and *Programme for Government*.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S1M-1357.1, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1357, in the name of Henry McLeish, on the implications of the chancellor's pre-budget statement for the Scottish Executive, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 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)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 46, Against 55, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The eighth question is, that motion S1M-1357, in the name of Henry McLeish, on the implications of the chancellor's pre-budget statement for the Scottish Executive, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 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)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 82, Against 19, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the implications of the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement for the Scottish Executive.

The Presiding Officer: The ninth question is, that motion S1M-1351, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on the designation of lead committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following designation of Lead Committee—

The Transport and the Environment Committee to consider the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2000.

The Presiding Officer: The 10th question is, that motion S1M-1352, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on the approval of statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the following Orders be approved:

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (No.4) (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/359) and

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (East Coast) (Scotland) Order (SSI 2000/360) and

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (East Coast) (No.2) (Scotland) Order

2000 (SSI 2000/370) and

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Notification of Authorisations etc.) (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/340).

The Presiding Officer: The 11th question is, that motion S1M-1353, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on sitting days, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk will be closed on 27, 28 and 29 December 2000.

The Presiding Officer: The 12th question is, that motion S1M-1354, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on rule 2.3.1, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 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)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

ABSTENTIONS

Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 94, Against 4, Abstentions 2.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following dates under Rule 2.3.1: 19–23 February 2001 inclusive, 9–20 April 2001 inclusive, 2 July–31 August 2001 inclusive, 8–19 October 2001 inclusive and 24 December 2001–4 January 2002 inclusive.

Mesothelioma

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S1M-1273, in the name of Duncan McNeil, on compensation for mesothelioma sufferers. The debate will be concluded after 30 minutes without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the plight of shipyard workers and their families who were exposed to asbestos, became ill and have now contracted mesothelioma; expresses concern over the length of time their compensation cases are taking to reach conclusion and the use of so-called "blanket denials" by the defenders, and notes that this practice victimises and denies justice to these cancer sufferers.

17:18

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I am pleased to be debating this motion today. I appreciate the support that I have had from back benchers from all parties.

Members will be glad to know that I will use the term "mesothelioma" sparingly, which will save me any embarrassment and spare the official reporters. However, I will use the term sparingly not only for those selfish reasons. Mesothelioma is a clinical and sterile term, which masks the true nature of a most painful and unpleasant form of cancer. That should not be hidden behind a word that is difficult to pronounce. Mesothelioma is a cancer of the lining of the lung. It is aggressive, painful and there is no cure. The victim is dead within 12 months.

The members of Clydeside Action on Asbestos who are sitting in the public gallery know only too well that a clinical medical term cannot describe the pain and suffering experienced by the victims of this disease. Unlike other major Clydeside industrial illnesses, such as deafness and welder's lung, exposure to asbestos did not only affect the workers themselves. Asbestos fibres that were brought into the home on overalls and in hair also damaged wives and children. I am aware of a case of a woman who was a bus conductress, who took shipyard workers to and from work. She had never been in a shipyard in her life, but she contracted cancer from asbestos on her passengers' overalls.

Mesothelioma is a huge problem. It affects more people than cervical cancer, and the death toll will double by 2020. Unfortunately, scientists believe that what they call the mesothelioma epidemic has not reached its peak.

Mesothelioma is more than a medical condition. On top of the pain and suffering and the anger and bitterness at having a terminal illness that could have been prevented, and on top of someone's guilt over possibly having damaged the health of their wife and children, there is a final insult that should be at the heart of this evening's debate: these cancer victims are being denied justice. I am not a legal expert, but I know that employers continued to expose their workers to asbestos long after the dangers of doing so became known. As a result, those workers are now dying an agonising death. In my book, there is a clear case to answer for that.

Unfortunately, when the victims try to claim compensation through the courts, those who defend the actions—the employers and the insurance companies—prolong their agony on spurious grounds. In researching this topic, I have been given information about a past case in which the legal representatives of a former shipyard worker who died of the disease made detailed submissions on the circumstances in which he was exposed to asbestos. Those submissions describe which shipyard he worked in, which contracts he worked on, the dates of his employment and the names of the friends and colleagues who worked with him.

In spite of the submissions, the defendants simply denied everything. They denied that the man was employed by them. They denied the existence of his friends and colleagues. They denied that the ships were built and even denied that the shipyards existed. In such cases, the victims are told that they never existed. What effect must it have on a person in the last few months of their life to be told that they never existed? Why should the legal representatives of the victims repeatedly have to prove to successive courts that the QE2 was built at John Brown's, Clydebank, in 1968? It sounds ludicrous, but that is happening in Scotland in the 21st century.

Of course, such spurious arguments can be disproved in a court of law, but that takes time and terminally ill people do not have time. I do not want to get emotional, but I suggest that—as a way of fighting back—we dedicate tonight's debate to Mr Lilly, whom members might have seen on the television programme "Frontline Scotland" recently. Owen Lilly was a former asbestos factory worker who suffered from mesothelioma. He died on Tuesday. His case was not scheduled to come to court until April 2001. What justice is there for Owen Lilly?

That is the reality: that cynical sharp practice denies victims the right to a jury, to interim payments and to other expenses that are incurred through having a terminal illness. If we are to move towards real justice for the victims, their

cases must be resolved through the civil legal process as a matter of urgency and priority. We must remove the obstacles that cause delays and prevent such cases from being heard by a jury. The victims want juries, not judges. We must provide the victims with much-needed short-term assistance and review the powers and procedures of the courts, to enable them to receive interim payments pending final resolution of their cases.

I am pleased that 44 back benchers from all parties have supported the motion and thank the members who have stayed behind to listen to the debate. I hope that the Parliament has sent a strong message to those involved in the justice system that the way that the system currently deals with mesothelioma sufferers is not acceptable to us and that we look forward to supporting them effectively.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Members will have noticed that Mr McNeil avoided direct comment on any legal cases that might be under way and should bear that fact in mind.

17:25

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Duncan McNeil on securing this debate on a very important subject. I must say that, until two weeks ago, I had never heard of mesothelioma. Then a constituent visited my surgery and told me her story. It seems that not only shipyard workers contract this disease. This woman worked in a Dundee engineering plant 50 years ago. She was a fit woman and used to visit the gym regularly until June, when she started to experience breathing problems. After she went to the doctor and was referred for tests, she was diagnosed with mesothelioma, which came as a bolt out of the blue. However, when she began to investigate the disease, she found that there was very little research on the condition and, unfortunately, no effective treatment as yet.

I have written to the chief medical officer and the Minister for Health and Community Care to find out what research is being carried out or is planned. There are some glimmers of hope. The Cancer Research Campaign has been investigating a new drug cocktail, the compound multi-targeted antifolate or MTA. Such glimmers are important for people who are suffering from the disease. Perhaps the minister will indicate what the future holds for research.

The minister might be aware of the comments of Julian Peto, the professor of epidemiology at London University, who has stated that asbestos-related deaths will reach epidemic levels by 2018, outstripping accidents as the prime cause of early death. That is backed up by the Cancer Research

Campaign, which claims that 250,000 western Europeans will die of mesothelioma by 2035. Such statistics are very worrying.

Finally, my constituent has now suffered the additional stress of having to argue her case for industrial injuries benefit and to prove how she contracted the condition, despite the fact that it happened 50 years ago. Surely that cannot be right. Would not a system of no-blame compensation be more appropriate in these cases?

In conclusion, I ask the minister to inform us of the state of research, to make representations to the social security minister about industrial injuries benefit and to investigate the whole issue of compensation.

17:28

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): I also congratulate Duncan McNeil on securing this debate and on his very clear exposition of the problem of mesothelioma. This issue is different from many other medical issues that we have debated in this chamber, in that this condition is a lethal disease with an absolutely clear cause. That is an important distinction.

I first became associated with the problem of asbestosis or asbestos-related diseases in the late 1970s when I worked for a construction company in Glasgow and discovered that its asbestos division did not have proper medical supervision. The laws on protection from asbestos were only then becoming totally clear.

This Government is faced with many competing claims for compensation on the grounds of disease caused by past events. We have already examined hepatitis C and haemophilia, and the Health and Community Care Committee is currently considering the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine and its proposed but unproven link to autism. Those are all difficult issues for individuals; however, it is important for the Parliament to investigate them sympathetically.

Although we will be asked to consider other conditions, these conditions are evident but not as complex. For example, the miners are now receiving compensation for lung disease. In their case, conditions of work were a major contributing factor, but because of the contribution of smoking and the general environment, it was difficult to address compensation. I am proud that the Labour Government has grappled with the problem. Although the process can be frustratingly slow for some of my constituents and their families, we are getting there.

Mesothelioma can be caused only by asbestos, so there may be issues of fault. Duncan McNeil

alluded to them and cases that have been settled have been cited. We need to consider no-fault compensation, because, as Duncan McNeil said, the families cannot wait. There is a system for such compensation, but the Pneumoconiosis etc (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 is not sufficiently sympathetic to cases of this sort. It does not allow us to proceed with the expeditious approach that Duncan McNeil and I would like.

When mesothelioma has been diagnosed, compensation should be immediate and generous. We need a society in which it is clear that people who suffer severe and serious consequences as a result of work, who were neither offered guidance on nor made aware of the disease that could be caused, should be compensated. The law will deal with the question of negligence in relation to known risks, which is a different matter, but the whole area of no-fault compensation in the workplace and associated medical risks should be re-examined.

The Government should perhaps consider compensating individuals on a no-fault basis and then seeking to recover funds from those who may have been negligent. That would be a different approach, which would remove the fundamental problem of companies that offer defence taking years to settle claims, even when previous cases have highlighted that the case law is correct. It seems to me that insurers, for goodness knows what purpose—probably profit—decide to delay compensation beyond a point that is reasonable for families.

17:32

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, too, welcome Duncan McNeil's debate, which raises awareness of mesothelioma. Clydeside Action on Asbestos is addressing many issues. I congratulate it on the excellent work that it has done.

Today, I met Mr and Mrs Brown from Ayr who, I am delighted to see, are in the gallery. Mrs Brown's father, Edward McCleish, died of the disease 20 years ago today. It is fitting that Mr and Mrs Brown are in the gallery tonight with their daughter, Adele, because 20 years later, they still feel that an injustice was done, and they want to lend their support to those fighting for recognition and compensation. Mrs Brown, who is a nurse, described her father's inch-by-inch death. Other members acknowledged the slow process.

I was shocked to read a letter sent to Mr McCleish's widow—Mrs Brown's mother—dated 24 July 1984, which reads:

"We have to advise you that the Insurers have made a purely nominal offer of £100 in connection with your claim. In all the circumstances, we have no doubt that it is an offer

which ought to be accepted".

I hope that the widows and families who were persuaded to accept such paltry payments will also be acknowledged in the new campaign.

I have also spoken to Gordon McVie of the Cancer Research Campaign, who stated his concern that people are still working on buildings and ships with asbestos without being given the proper advice or taking the proper precautions. Indeed, he mentioned that some companies are exporting asbestos for use in developing countries. I understand that trials are being carried out in Newcastle that offer a glimmer of hope of improving treatment and prolonging life, but that it will be five to 10 years before gene therapy, although exciting, is widely available.

It is interesting that medical research has been done on work-related cancers for more than 200 years. I hope that this debate will help to support not only those suffering from mesothelioma, but those likely to suffer from that condition in future. I also hope that appropriate health and safety checks are done to ensure that our problems are not exported to other countries and that employers take adequate measures to protect staff in the light of the known dangers of asbestos.

17:35

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I will be brief, but I also want to congratulate Duncan McNeil. I can identify with many of the comments made by Richard Simpson. Quite honestly, the time spent and the delays encountered—sometimes deliberately—are deplorable. There will be some difficulty in relation to people who have changed employers, but there is no excuse for the delays.

Richard Simpson mentioned private companies, but I must point out that the issue relates to the public sector as well. I served an apprenticeship in the dockyard at Rosyth. There was an absence of information on asbestos, and I am sure that many of my fellow workers faced many dangers, in line with those in other shipbuilding industries.

For the benefit of the minister, I want to raise a local point. In Troon, a site that has been contaminated with asbestos is being worked on. Ultimately, the site will be encased, which is to be welcomed. At the same time, it will take a lot of construction work and effort to move the earth that is contained in that site.

I ask the minister to take on board the warnings that we have heard today and to ensure that the Health and Safety Executive takes an interest in the activities on that piece of land. The evidence of asbestosis, as I prefer to call it, in Troon demonstrates that the disease exists in former

shipyard workers in that area. There is a feeling in the community that the disturbance of that land could bring its own dangers. Some assurances on the subject from the minister would be most welcome.

17:35

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): I appreciate that the issues raised by Duncan McNeil today are mainly related to justice rather than to my area of responsibility. It was intended that the Deputy Minister for Justice would wind up. Unfortunately, Iain Gray has had to attend another engagement this afternoon and I am therefore responding.

However, some health matters arose and I will respond to those first. Most research is driven by external bodies such as the Cancer Research Campaign and the drug companies. Clearly, however, cancer is a priority for the Executive and I am sure that the chief scientist's office would welcome applications for research into this dreadful condition.

Mary Scanlon mentioned the Newcastle trial, which is a good example of a small-scale trial. It will proceed to a larger-scale trial in the near future. I was concerned to hear what Mary Scanlon said about health and safety checks following her conversation with Professor McVie. I will follow that up now that it has been drawn to my attention.

I congratulate Duncan McNeil on securing this debate today and on putting forward the case in such a moving manner. The Executive recognises the plight of sufferers of mesothelioma and their families. It is a dreadful disease, and where it is caused by the fault of others, sufferers should, of course, be able to obtain compensation for their loss and suffering as quickly as possible. No one could say otherwise.

In recognition of that, the Government of the day introduced the Pneumoconiosis etc (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 to provide a UK-wide compensation scheme to cover this and similar diseases. Since that act came into force in 1980, more than 12,000 claims have been made, more than half of which have been settled. The total cost of the scheme in the UK to the end of March this year was £72.5 million. The average cost of payments to sufferers and dependants respectively is £15,169 and £6,561. No separate figures are available for Scotland.

However, the scheme has limitations. It was designed as a safety net for cases where there was no longer any employer against whom a claim could be made. Many claims against employers are taken to court under laws dealing with

liabilities for personal injuries, just as other claims for industrial injuries or diseases are. It is those cases that Mr McNeil is primarily concerned with today. I have listened to what he has said, particularly about the length of time that those cases take to reach a conclusion.

These cases are not always easy to resolve. It is inevitable that time is needed to do what is necessary to prepare the claims and to deal with all the complexities. However, I am concerned that cases should proceed as quickly as possible to resolution. It is utterly unacceptable that employers or their insurers should deliberately delay in the hope that the sufferers of this terrible disease will give up or, in some tragic cases, die before the cases can be resolved. It is particularly unacceptable if the purpose of employers or their insurers is to alter the make-up of the claim or to reduce its value.

Even though the Damages (Scotland) Act 1993 has amended the law to transmit to the executor of a deceased person the like rights to damages, the effect of the current provisions is that a claim by the executor does not necessarily have the same value as the claim that might have been pursued by the deceased would have had. There is a balancing mechanism that enables relatives to claim damages for loss of support, distress and anxiety, grief and sorrow, and loss of society, but they tend to be less than the full original claim. Such an approach by employers or their insurers would deprive the sufferer of the benefit, support and care that would be available as a result of any award of damages. Ministers will consider carefully evidence of any delaying tactics.

I acknowledge what Mr McNeil said about the use of blanket denials. As I understand it, some employers simply deny all liability and all the factual statements that claimants have made. That means that in every case the claimant is required to prove every fact and all elements of the monetary claim for damages.

Employers who take that position leave themselves open to an application for a summary decree on the grounds that a defence to the action has not been disclosed. It is difficult to believe that, in cases where a blanket denial is used, the employer is completely unable to agree to anything that the claimant says. It is surely in the general public interest that employers should seek to minimise the differences between them and the claimants, to narrow down the areas of dispute and to seek routes to speedy settlement, notably on the amount of damages.

Although the management of the claims by the court is a matter for the court to decide under its own rules and practices, I urge all those who are involved to ensure that cases proceed as quickly as possible. There is no reason why cases cannot

be dealt with reasonably expeditiously. The rules and administrative practices of the Court of Session, where most cases are raised, allow 13 weeks for the parties to state their case in written pleadings, and 19 weeks thereafter to prepare for a proof or jury trial. The 19-week period is a target that has been agreed by the Lord President and ministers. Accordingly, the court is ready to hear cases after about 32 weeks, which I consider to be sufficient for even the most complex issues that are involved to be properly focused.

I am aware that most cases take longer than that to reach a conclusion. That is usually because the court has been persuaded on the application of one of the parties that it is in the interests of justice to allow more time for case preparation. That is not a matter in which I can directly interfere, although it would be appalling if such applications were used as a device by employers or their insurers to delay. Other matters, such as the availability of chosen counsel, can also result in delay. There is more to consider than just the approach that is taken by employers when met with a claim.

Although it would not be proper for me to seek to influence the private nature of relationships between parties and their legal representatives, I would expect all those concerned to recognise their responsibility to the public and their clients to take cases forward as quickly as possible. It is open to the court to make an interim award of damages in certain circumstances but only where employers admit liability. That may be a matter for further consideration.

It has been suggested also that more use should be made of juries to assess these claims. The right to seek a jury trial exists in the Court of Session. The case of *Gibson v McAndrew Wormald*, reported in the 1998 *Scots Law Times* at page 562, is an example of an asbestos-related case being sent to a jury. However, the appropriate mode of inquiry is again a matter for the court to decide and there is a view that the complexity of these cases renders them unsuitable for lay jurors to determine. I can understand that view but it is a matter for the court, and properly so.

More generally, I also support the proposals contained in a report of a working group, chaired by Lord Coulsfield, aimed at speeding up the resolution of reparation cases in the Court of Session, including cases of this sort. Those proposals are out to consultation at the moment, and ministers will do what they can to support the initiatives being considered.

Lord Coulsfield's proposals involve the court taking a more active part in ensuring that time limits for case preparation are adhered to and include setting a date for the hearing of the case at

a much earlier stage in the proceedings than is done at present. They also call for a fuller disclosure of the position of defenders or employers, particularly with regard to the quantification of compensation. The whole point is to encourage parties to settle earlier, because in more than 90 per cent of cases that is what ultimately happens.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I fully understand and share the concerns raised by Mr McNeil. While I recognise the difficulty of these cases for the courts, and I am satisfied that the courts seek to deal with the cases as quickly as they can in many cases, I urge all concerned, particularly employers and their insurers, to seek all means to speed up a solution of such cases.

Where possible, I would hope that those concerned could negotiate settlements. At the very least, they should co-operate with the courts in minimising the delays in bringing such cases forward. The courts obviously recognise the need to take steps to speed up procedures for cases such as these. The work of Lord Coulsfield's group is an initiative that I welcome and fully support.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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